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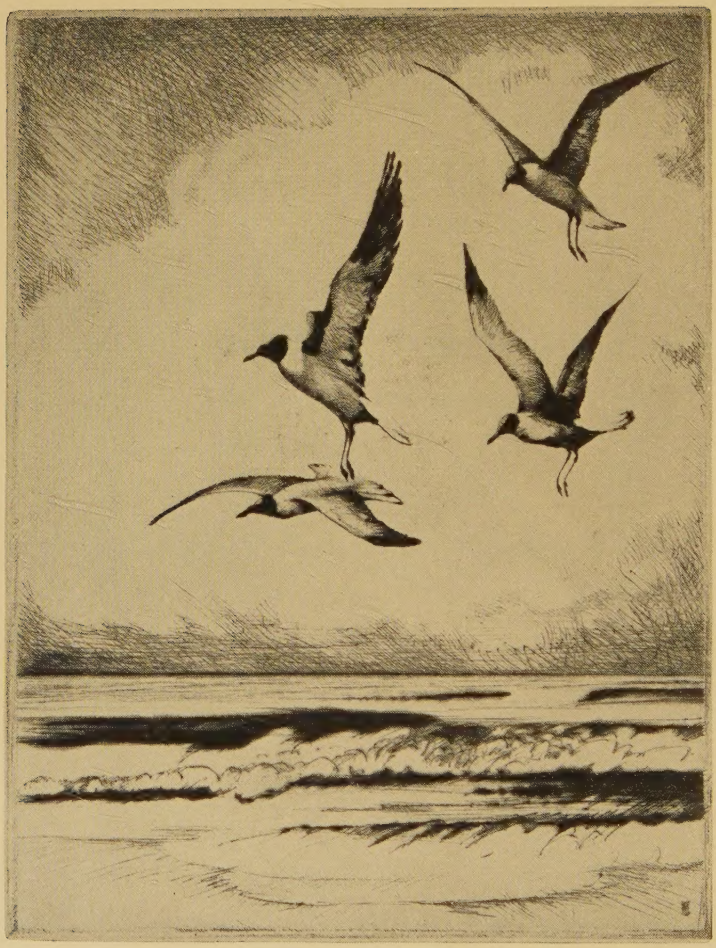
WILD HONEY

By SAMUEL SCOVILLE, Jr.

Everyday Adventures

Wild Folk

Wild Honey



LAUGHING GULLS

WILD HONEY

by

SAMUEL SCOVILLE, JR.

With Reproductions of Etchings by
EMERSON TUTTLE

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1929

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For those who live a part of their lives under the open sky, who follow singing voices through long May days, and find help on hilltops, beauty in orchid-haunted bogs, and adventures everywhere, this book is written

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WILD HONEY

I

WILD HONEY

A swarm of bees in May
Is worth a load of hay.

A swarm of bees in June
Is worth a silver spoon.

But a swarm in July
Is not worth a fly.

THIS is the story of a silver-spoon swarm which flew into my life on the longest day of the year, at a quarter to one, sun time.

When I was a boy in Connecticut — it was several years ago — a bee tree was one of the romances of life in the country. The only native social bees in North America are the bumblebees, of which there are some fifty varieties. Our other social bees, the honeybees, were brought here from Europe centuries ago. They are, however, wild bees at heart, and every year swarms of them escape from the farms and take to the woods, thenceforth to live happily in hollow trees instead of waterproof, mouseproof, mothproof hives. The man or boy fortunate enough to come upon one of these bee trees has indeed found a treasure of brown and white and gold and amber sweetness.

The best is the white-clover honey, the color of the flower. Next comes that transparent, scented honey which the bees distill from the blossoms of the bass-

wood, as we call the linden trees in Connecticut. Apple-blossom honey, which is golden, and red-raspberry honey, which is amber, rank next. Last and latest of all is that nut-brown honey which the bees gather from those fields of buckwheat which show here and there on the hillsides like patches of summer snow. The honey is dark and has a curious heavy flavor like malt.

Cream Hill, one of the twenty-seven hills of Cornwall, where the family farm was situated, was full of legends of bee trees. My grandfather once found a bee tree in his garden one Sunday afternoon and the next day took fifty pounds of honey out of it.

Old Jud Allen, the son of Deacon Allen, who was born in the year of the Declaration of Independence, was the great bee man of Cornwall when I was a boy. The good Deacon, when he was twenty-five, married a woman of forty-eight. After her death, to balance matters, at fifty-nine he married a bride of twenty-five, and Jud was the child of this second marriage. Shortly before he was born, his mother had such a craving for honey that the Deacon had to drive clear over to Goshen to get her some.

Jud always believed that his love of bees was due to that honey. At any rate no bee would sting him, and he knew more about them and found more bee trees than any other man in Cornwall.

Once, when he was sitting on his porch, he noticed that a number of bees flew past him, all headed in the general direction of a great white oak tree on the other side of the Housatonic River, and, rowing across, he located a swarm in the hollow top of the tree.

Sometimes he would hunt through the woods for bee trees, depending upon his eyes and ears alone. At other times he used a bee box, a pasteboard box containing a little honey, in which he would imprison a number of bees that he would pick from the wild flowers, after marking each one of them with a tag of cotton wool. When the bees had filled themselves full of honey, he would release one of them. The bee would circle about to get his bearings and then dart away in a bee line toward its tree. Following the line as far as he could with his eye, the old man would move along it for a few hundred yards and release another bee, and keep up this performance until he was near enough to locate the tree either by seeing or by hearing the swarm.

Sometimes a swarm will use an old house for a hive or take possession of a disused room. Two years ago my brother removed the paneling from a room in my great-grandfather's house and found that the whole side of the room was lined with masses of honeycomb.

The most celebrated bee tree ever known in Cornwall was found on Deacon Ridgway's farm. The Deacon had snowy-white hair and a face as gentle and kindly as his nature. Yet in spite of his goodness the old man knew how to protect his rights. One cold November day he heard the sound of an axe in one of his wood lots far up on the slope of Rattlesnake Mountain. Making his way to the sound by following one of those hidden paths which are part of the seizin of every New England farm, he found two bad boys from the village, equipped with axes and four tin

pails, chopping at a big chestnut tree in which they had located a swarm of bees.

It is a criminal offense in Connecticut to cut down a bee tree, without permission, on another man's land. Accordingly, seating himself comfortably behind a log, the Deacon waited until the boys, after an hour's hard work, had felled the tree and split its tough trunk. Only when they had exposed a treasure of dripping honeycomb did he interfere.

"Boys," he said, "it's a pretty serious thing that you've been and done. You go home now and come around to my house to-morrow morning, and I'll figure up what that tree's worth to me."

The crestfallen boys retired, leaving their pails behind them, which the old Deacon promptly proceeded to fill. When they came to his house the next day he gave them each a pail of honey and told them that after thinking the matter over he had decided not to charge them anything for the tree.

The good Deacon has slept for many a year on the green hillside where rest those folk of Cornwall who have won the reward of their labors. Those two bad boys have become prosperous citizens and fathers of families, but from that day to this neither of them has ever cared for honey.

Until recently, the nearest I had ever come to finding a bee tree myself was the discovery of a swarm in a patch of woods not far from Haverford, Pennsylvania. A band of desperate adventurers, none of them over nine years old, of whom I had been elected captain, had christened the place "Sherwood Forest." There we would wander on a holiday or a Sunday afternoon

THE LAST STAND

and half hope to hear the horn of Robin Hood or Will Scarlett sounding among the great beech trees, or to meet Little John or Friar Tuck hunting the dun deer.

In that wood, one May afternoon, as we started for home in the twilight, we saw hanging from an oak tree a golden-brown mass of bees half as big as a bushel basket, probably a runaway swarm from some near-by farm.

Another day the Band traveled to the Barrens and stopped at the first cabin I ever built there, the one with the two fireplaces and a secret staircase, which burned down in a forest fire just before the War. On that day we found a swarm of bees which had come down the chimney hanging from a beam just over our table, and we ate lunch beneath them, hardly daring to speak above a whisper, since a broken swarm in a small room would have been dangerous indeed.

Then, after all these years, it remained for me to find my first bee tree and to be, perhaps, the first observer who has ever actually seen a wild swarm take possession of a tree in the depths of a forest.

It all began with the longest day of the year. When that promised to dawn fair and lovely, as such a day should be, a longing came upon me which fretted me like thirst for "Faraway," my little cabin by the brown stream among the pines in the heart of the Barrens.

It was Midsummer Eve when I reached the cabin. The swift stream stretched away in the moonlight like silvered velvet, and the leaves of the sweet gums and the swamp maples made a dim, green web along its banks.

Overhead, some bird which I could not identify gave

a strange, wild cry and repeated it a few seconds later a great distance away, showing how fast it was flying through the black-violet sky above.

The shadows of the waving trees made a fretted, magical pattern on the smooth surface of the water. A pine-barren pickerel frog, all emerald and gold and purple-black, snored, and some other frogs unknown to me gave a couple of loud, startling notes which sounded like the clapping of two boards together. Then suddenly, in the distance, the stressed, hurried notes of a whippoorwill pealed through the darkness, to be answered by one close to the cabin. Over and over and over again those birds of the night repeated their triple notes with a little click after each one, hurrying as if they feared to be interrupted before they could finish. As the wild, sweet melody thrilled through the darkness, it seemed to me as if the moonlight itself had been set to music. When it stopped, the lonely waste land lay still as sleep. Then, as the full moon climbed the sky, from far-away bogs and gold-green pools came the clear voices of late hylas, like tangled chimes of tiny silver bells.

When they stopped for breath, the wood frogs, as if they had waited for that moment, burst out into a perfect pandemonium of honking, quacking notes. I am ashamed to confess that, on one of my first nights spent alone in the Barrens, I heard those frogs in a lonely marsh and, convinced that they were a flock of wild ducks, nearly drowned myself wading through the bog to find them. Always, however, like a will-o'-the-wisp, the sounds moved farther and farther off into the marsh until I waded back wetter and wiser.

When at last the clamor of the frogs stopped as suddenly as it had begun, I left my bag in the cabin and in the moonlight hurried down a winding path which led through a little dip in the soft yellow grass where, not fifty yards from my porch, the wild deer bed in winter. Just at the edge of this hollow I found a clump of the flowers which I had hoped to see. Wine-red, gold, ivory-white, and pale green, they grew from a mass of hollow, crimson-streaked leaves filled with clear water, and I knelt down in the moonlight to revel in the beauty of the pitcher plants, which I had not seen in blossom for three long years.

The sight of them brought to my mind another discovery that I had made the day when last I found them blossoming, and I followed the path until it wound through tussocks of ochre-colored grass. Parting their stems, I searched through several without finding anything. Then, as I came to the last tussock of all, a tiny bird slipped away like a shadow, giving an alarm note sharp as the clicking of two pebbles together. Before me in the moonlight showed a deep nest of woven grass containing four rose-white eggs blotched with brown at the larger end and showing in the moonlight like pearls in a casket of tawny gold. Here and there through the fabric of the nest were woven dry leaves, the field mark of the nest of the Maryland yellow-throat, who wears a black domino and has a song that sounds like "witchery, witchery, witchery." As always, when I leaned down to study more closely the exquisite little eggs in their beautiful setting, I had the feeling that I had come upon treasure-trove, such as he must

experience who unearths a crock of gold or stumbles upon a chest of doubloons.

Followed a night of such sleep as one has only in the Barrens, breathing in deep the spiced air which had come from far away across a million pines.

The next morning I was up before sunrise, and from one window of my cabin looked out over a sea of green-sanguine, made by the newly opened leaves and rosy tassels of the scrub oaks, while above them, like great green tourmalines, towered the pitch pines, and the leaves of the aspens showed here and there in patches of pure emerald.

From my other window I looked out upon the stream and gasped with the sheer loveliness of it. Shrouded in mist, the shimmering water was a midnight-violet, while through the fleecy rising wreaths the leaves of the overhanging trees showed in blending, changing shades of exquisite green.

A moment later, and I dived deep from my tiny landing of split cedar logs into the soft water which lapped me like silk, while its clean tingle thrilled through every muscle and nerve like cold fire.

Then, after breakfast, I started exploring. That part of the Barrens a century and a half ago was a great iron country. New Lisbon Forge was built in 1730 and Mary Ann Forge, three miles away, in 1789. To-day all that remains of Mary Ann Forge is a heap of slag and some cleared spaces in the woods.

The forges are gone, the old mansions made of short-lived pitch pines have disappeared, and the very graves of those men and women who peopled the Bar-

rens are forgotten. Yet one sign and seal of their lives has been forever stamped upon the land that once was theirs. In every direction through the woods and across the bogs run the paths which once led to forgotten forges, sawmills, houses, and taverns. Still they stretch across the Barrens and end at jade-green ponds, delectable banks of swift, brown streams, and clearings ringed around with pines, black gums, and white cedars. One of them leads to Ong's Hat, once a hostelry known throughout the state. Now only a great post oak and a clearing show where it stood. Another path runs to Upper Mill, to-day but a green bank on the shore of a little lake. Near by still stands an old tavern built of imperishable cedar logs with the date "1720" cut in one of them, which once stood on the old cattle route to Perth Amboy. Charlie Rogers, a little Scotchman and a fine fellow, lives there alone and reads every week a newspaper from Glasgow. He saves for me George the Third pennies, which he finds in the sand, and Indian arrowheads picked up along the shores of the lake. Other paths lead to the deserted settlement of Sheep Pen Hill, to Mount Misery, where the rattlesnake den is, to Double Trouble, Gum Spring, Stop th' Jade Run, and Apple Pie Hill. Many more lead no one knows where, and to me one of the many joys of the Barrens is the exploring of these paths. I have learned one which begins with a perilous plank slanting far down from the window of an old sawmill, circles three bogs, twists its way through virgin timber where in winter one may meet the gray deer of the Barrens, and

ends at a lonely little lake where black duck hide and bittern boom.

I know the path which crosses the creek high above the water on a fallen tree, which we have named Treetop Bridge, winds through sand myrtle and Barrens heather, and ends up at the Iron Spring. Then there is the Indian Trail, only a part of which I can trace, which was used long before any white man entered that country, the path across the cedar swamp to the sulphur spring, and scores of others, each one an adventure.

To-day I had intended to explore a path which was sunken two full feet below the surface of the ground, and had started to cross the stream at Treetop Bridge when something happened which convinced me that Midsummer Day was to be as lucky as it was long.

Thirty yards away I saw a pine warbler fly to a branch of a pitch pine about fifteen feet up. The pine warbler is that bird of the Barrens which has a pale yellow throat and breast, a greenish-brown back with whitish wing bars, and for a song a trill like that of the chipping sparrow, only sweeter and more sudden. It is the earliest warbler back in the spring, arriving even before the yellow-palm, about the twenty-fourth of March, and is one of the three most abundant warblers in the Barrens, the prairie and the Maryland yellowthroat being the other two. In spite of its numbers, few bird lovers have ever seen the nest of a pine warbler, so well concealed is it.

As I watched this one, I distinctly saw him carry food to a hidden nest. Hurrying to the tree, I could see no sign of it save a piece of string dangling from the

branch. Climbing up to the limb, I looked at last into one of the most beautifully hidden nests imaginable. It was set between two twigs in such a way that it did not show at all from below, and was so shaded over with pine needles that I never should have seen it from above if the bird had not shown me just where it was placed. It was beautifully made of cedar bark and strips of weed stalks, and lined with fine roots and a little hair, with an inner covering of the egg sacs of spiders and the feathers which the pine warbler, like the yellow-palm, the myrtle, and the blackpoll, always uses. It was partly lashed to the bough by the piece of string which hung untidily below it, and inside were two half-fledged young birds.

For a long time I studied it with the delight which only a bird lover feels when he has come upon some rare nest. At last I climbed down and, crossing Tree-top Bridge, followed a path which wound its way through such flowers as are to be found only in the Barrens. Here and there, like puffs of white vapor, showed the great, cone-shaped blossoms of the turkey beard. Summer may make many invasions and retreats in the Barrens, but when once the turkey beards sway and dance against the green, she has come to stay.

The flower head of the turkey beard is made up of a myriad of tiny, five-petaled blossoms and round white buds which fluff out day by day until the mass of bloom is half as large as a man's fist. From a distance the flowers seem white, but when compared with those of the white azalea — the standard of whiteness among the flowers of the Barrens, as El Nath is among the

stars — the petals are seen to be filmed with palest gold.

The flower head grows on a shaggy green stem a foot and a half high, which shoots up from a mass of leaves like coarse marsh grass. In spite of an odor of carrion, the turkey beards give an indescribable beauty to the landscape, and always bring to my mind dry, hot, sweet days in the Barrens, full of the sandalwood scent of the white azalea and the hot-weather songs of the prairie warbler, whose seven wire-thin notes run up instead of down the scale, and that of the chewink, who sings tirelessly all day long, "Drink your tea-ee-ee, drink your tea-ee-ee."

Farther on, right in the middle of the path, grew a great clump of goat's-rue, later than the lupin with its rose-red and pale gold butterfly blossoms like stained silk and ivory. All around me were the scentless, white blossoms of the staggerbush, shaped like urns, with pink stems and pink sepals, resembling the earlier cassandra, whose smaller blossoms grow in rows and have a fragrance like that of the lily of the valley.

As the path approached moist ground, my eye caught sight of a little slough lying deep among the golden-green Hudsonia, which seemed to be lined with velvet of a strange crystal-rose color. When I came closer, I saw that the whole hollow was carpeted with hundreds of spatulate sundews, whose flat leaves were covered with pink hairs, each one tipped with a tiny, glistening drop of sticky liquid. Whenever an unfortunate insect alighted on one of the leaves, its feet

were entangled in the deadly dew, and it was at once enmeshed by the hairs, which encircled it like a net, while the leaf itself curled over so as to keep it from escaping. Not until the victim had been sucked dry by the fierce little plant did the hairs open and the leaf uncurl.

The pitcher plant, with its hollow leaf filled with water and lined with spines all pointing downward, also traps and feeds upon insects, yet it does not impress one as having the fierce intelligence shown by the sundew. The rare, thread-leaved sundew (*filiformis*) is also found in my part of the Barrens. Its narrow leaves are long and threadlike, but quite as fatal as those of its flat-leaved sister.

Beyond the sundew I turned into the woods for a drink, following a twisting trail to the bank of the stream down which it zigzagged until it ended in a little hollow guarded by two white cedar trees. There under the bank was the Iron Spring, deep and clear as glass. The snow-white sand at its bottom was streaked with golden yellow, showing the presence of the iron with which that whole country is underlaid, while the ice-cold water had a curious medicinal tang which after a while one grows to like even better than the sweet, soft flavor of the brown cedar water of the creek.

After leaving the spring I followed an old highway abandoned so long ago that large trees grew down its centre, yet still showing the ruts left by the chaises and Conestoga wagons of another century. It led me to Lower Mill, and I sat for a long time on the bank of the mill pond beneath a solitary pine, the last of a great

multitude which had gone down under the axe. While there I caught sight of a dark, brownish-gray bird with two white wing bars sitting quietly on a limb of a post-oak tree. As I watched him he suddenly drawled out his name, "Pee-a-wee." Leaving the path to look at him more closely, by some miracle my eye caught sight of what seemed to be a large, lichen-covered knot at the end of a limb in the oak, and to my delight I realized that for the second time in my life I had discovered the nest of a wood pewee. Although larger, it is nearly as difficult to locate as the nest of a humming bird, which it resembles in being decorated on the outside with green and gray lichens. As I was carefully examining it from below, the mother bird came flitting through the tree and settled down upon the nest, regarding me sternly out of her round black eyes. Only when I climbed to the bough above did she at last slip off and allow me to look down upon three of the most beautiful of our wild-bird eggs. They were pure white with a wreath of sepia-brown blotches around the larger end, overlaying a faint ring of pale lavender spots. The eggs were almost the same size as the more common white ones of the bridge pewee or phœbe. The nest itself, about fifteen feet from the ground, was made of grass, lined with rootlets, and thatched on the outside with lichens fastened on the nest with cobwebs, and it had an opening a little larger than a silver dollar.

Even with the finding of the pine warbler and wood pewee's nests, my good fortune had only just begun, for as I followed the sunken path through the woods a female prairie warbler flew out from a clump of

sheep-laurel bushes just ahead of me with that curious tremble of her outspread wings which is always the mark of a nesting bird. Although I knew that the nest must be close to me, for a long time I could not find it. At last, lying flat upon the ground and looking up, I caught sight of it beautifully concealed beneath the wine-red blossoms and evergreen leaves. When I parted the twigs and at last looked into the nest, it seemed to me that I had never seen a lovelier one, for it was lined with the soft cream-brown wool of the cinnamon fern, against which showed the four rose-white eggs with their lavender and tawny aureoles. Again and again the parent birds flitted anxiously around me, coming so close that I could plainly see the reddish-brown markings on the middle of the back of the male, the black line over his eye, the white tail feathers, and that field mark which distinguishes the prairie warbler from all others, the sunshine-yellow underparts with the sides heavily streaked with black. The magnolia warbler, the Canada, and the Cape May all have yellow underparts streaked with black, but only the prairie warbler has these streaks confined to the sides.

Finally I started on again, only to happen upon a fresh adventure. It began with a whiff of a delightful and unknown perfume. Scrambling up out of the sunken path, I followed my nose until it brought me to a little clearing where probably some house had stood in the old days. Still I could see no sign of any bush or tree or flower which could be responsible for the clouds of fragrance which drifted toward me, in-

describably sweet, yet with a certain delicacy and spicy freshness which kept it from being cloying.

At length, sniffing the air like a hunting dog, I reached a low gum tree, half-covered with the trefoil leaves of that vine which from the time of Noah — who knew it to his hurt — has been praised and blamed more than any other by man. This one had thatched one side of the tree with a tangle of tough stems and broad leaves, downy on the lower side, by which sign I recognized the summer grape. There are four wild grapes in this part of the country: the frost or chicken grape, which has bunches of fruit no larger than a small cherry, which require frost to mellow their rasping sourness; the river grape with its smooth, shining leaf like that of the Japanese ivy, whose small red fruit was probably the forerunner of our little Delaware grape; the fragrant fox grape, which grows in scattering bunches and is so prized by housewives for jellies; and last and best of all, the summer grape, which grows in compact bunches of deep blue fruit and is the ancestor of the Concord.

Beneath the green leaves of that grapevine there hung on wine-red stems clusters of pale yellow flowers so small as to be almost microscopic. Yet from them streamed and gushed a fragrance which filled the air for hundreds of yards around with a sweetness which surpassed all the perfumes of Araby the Blest.

As I stood there drinking in great draughts of that unsurpassable fragrance, I heard from a near-by tree the slow, passionate song of the scarlet tanager, who sings as though he loved the beauty of his notes too

much to hurry them. From the sky above came the "peent, peent," of the nighthawks hunting in broad daylight over their eggs laid, like those of their brothers, the whippoorwills, on the bare ground, with no sign of any nest. When at last I moved away from that vine whose magic had bewitched all that part of the Barrens, I followed my path until I came to where a faint trail led away to the stream half a mile away. The day was yet young, and I decided to explore this little detour before coming back to my main path. It lost itself in a maze of bogs before it ever reached the stream, but yielded me one small adventure, of interest perhaps only to a botanist. Just as I was turning back to return to firmer ground, my eyes caught sight of a clump of the broad green leaves of the skunk cabbage, that first flower of the year, whose curved horn of crimson-lake lined with green and gold pushes its way above the frozen ground as early as January. Now, skunk cabbage is no great rarity in Pennsylvania, but just as our common mourning-cloak butterfly is a great discovery for the British entomologist, so in the Pine Barrens skunk cabbage is as rare as the cranes-fly orchid or the pink-and-white lady-slipper in other places. Yet there it was, unmistakable to the eye—as well as the nose.

Returning to my path, I followed it for another mile, and suddenly my last and best adventure of the day was upon me. It began with a ringing hum so loud and deep that I thought that an aeroplane was passing overhead and craned my neck to catch a glimpse of it. Then suddenly I saw a black and whirling vortex of

bees some twenty feet above the ground coming toward me through the soft, warm air, and I crouched down behind a bush to watch this runaway swarm, miles from any house or hive, beating back to the forest from which its remote ancestors had come. This one had evidently located a tree through its advance couriers, for it came straight toward me, flying steadily, with none of the stops and hesitations which a swarm shows when it first leaves the hive. The gyrating bees made a column perhaps six feet high, and swept through the air with a hum that could have been heard a quarter of a mile away. Nearer and nearer they came, while I crouched close behind a bush. Then, just as I thought that they would fly right over my head, the whole swarm landed on the bare bole of a dead pine tree not ten feet from where I sat. The tree, which was about forty feet high, had evidently been struck by lightning at some remote period, for deep cracks showed in its surface. For a moment the trunk was girdled with bees which began to cluster and hook themselves together in brown masses some fifteen feet from the ground. As I watched them make a circular, humming mass my only thought was that they had alighted there to rest after a long journey, since, except for the deep cracks in the trunk, there was nothing which showed that the tree was hollow. For a while the brown mass became larger and larger as late-comers came hurrying through the air and added themselves to the swarm. It was a quarter to one, sun time, when I first saw them. By ten minutes past two all the bees were on the tree, and the fierce, resonant hum which

I had first heard had died down to a subdued drone.

Suddenly I noticed that the mass of bees was becoming smaller. Focusing my field glasses on them, I saw that the swarm was crawling into the tree through the open cracks. By half-past two they were all inside, and by twenty minutes to three the bees were flying in and out of a large crack as if they had lived in that tree all their lives. Without taking a moment to rest or even to become accustomed to their new home, the never-ending hunt for honey had begun.

For a long time I sat and watched them fly back and forth, and wondered at my good fortune. Hundreds of observers have seen swarms go by or have found them hanging to trees, but so far as my reading goes I have never before known of anyone who had actually seen a swarm of bees take possession of a tree.

In his essay on the "Pastoral Bees," John Burroughs wrote, "No one to my knowledge has ever seen the bees house-hunting in the woods."

In all those hundreds of square miles of Barrens, that I should have happened to be at the exact place where the swarm alighted seemed almost too good to be true. Yet so it was, and this adventure of watching the beginning of a bee tree was the climax of that golden day of the year to me. As to what became of the swarm and their treasure of wild honey when frost came—that, as Kipling used to say, is another story.

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II

TREMBLING EARTH

THERE are different ways of meeting a fiftieth birthday. Some substitute auction for action. Others stop eating the things which they like and live mostly on spinach until death relieves them of their sufferings.

Then there are those who, not satisfied to leave well enough alone, charter high-priced specialists to search for obscure maladies — which they usually discover. All of these devices of semicentenarians leave me cold. For myself the halfway mark — for I intend to live to be a hundred or die in the attempt — meant now or never. Wherefore, ever since that anniversary I have highly resolved to miss no more adventures.

"If I must be dragged into old age, it shall be backwards," wrote Montaigne — and I agree with him and am going to set my heels in deep and hold back as long as possible against the grip of that toothless hag who at the last overthrows us all.

Accordingly, when I was invited to spend a week on a hidden island in the almost unknown depths of that great marsh which lies between Georgia and Florida, I promptly accepted.

The Seminole Indians, who once lived there, have christened those six hundred square miles of swamp "Okefinokee," which means in their tongue "Trembling Earth." It is there that the celebrated Suwanee River has its source, and there too can still be found

the magnificent ivory-billed woodpecker, now nearly as rare as the passenger pigeon or the Carolina paroquet, and other birds and beasts unknown to everyday life. Moreover, the island which I was to visit was once a Seminole stronghold before that fierce tribe were driven down into the Everglades. Even now its mounds are occasionally visited by wanderers of that race who find their way back to the lost home of their ancestors.

A day and a night after the invitation, and I stood at the beginning of a long channel which stretched away into the mysterious depths of the marsh. As I stared at its shimmering length, there flowed into my blood that joy of the wilderness which so many times has come to me upon approaching some unexplored fastness of the wilds. A moment later and I was in another world where everything was strange and new.

The bleached grass of the banks showed a pale ochre against the copper-brown water, in which strange green and violet lights gleamed, like those one sees in the depths of a black opal. The crimson keys of the red maples were the color of shed blood against the towering cypresses, shrouded with Spanish moss, which gave a curious touch of melancholy to the landscape.

Patches of small lilies, pearl-white with a tinge of crimson, — " milk-and-wine," the country people call them, — and drifts of snowy violets, with sepia pencilings within their exquisite petals, showed here and there on the banks, which were laced with muscadine and bamboo vine. Little waves of perfume floated through the air from the butter-yellow blossoms of the wild jessamine, which resembles the false foxglove

of the North and has a fragrance like that of no other flower.

Suddenly, from the marsh beside the canal, a white heron with slim black legs and a yellow bill took flight and flapped away like a great, snowy butterfly, and I recognized the American egret, which I had only occasionally seen as a rare visitor in the North. Here these birds were abundant everywhere. Perched on the tops of the cypresses, or rising from the Swamp where they fed, they added a touch of almost unearthly beauty to the landscape.

Then, as we rounded the first bend in the stream, three great birds, shadow-gray in color, with naked reddish heads, round black eyes, and long legs and bills, flew across the canal ahead of us. Unlike the herons, which always fly with a kink in their necks, these birds had their necks stretched straight out, as were their legs, and they presented a curiously stiff, wooden appearance as they flew. They were like no other birds that I had ever seen, and I suddenly realized that I was looking for the first time at a sand-hill crane, not so rare as his larger and almost extinct brother, the whooping crane, but still scarce enough to be an event for most ornithologists. Later on I learned to know their loud trumpet note, "kuk-a-row-ow-ow," rippling across the marsh like the call of some giant tree toad. The birds themselves were among the wariest of all the marsh folk, never alighting anywhere except on the ground, and with their wild alarm notes doing sentry duty for all of the wild folk near them.

After several hours on the canal we reached an

SPIRIT OF THE SWAMP

osprey's nest, a cartload of sticks in the top of a towering cypress. There we left the tiny canal and, using a curious three-pronged pole, the "push-pole" of the Swamp, followed hidden waterways and secret marks through the very heart of the marsh, everywhere dotted with innumerable islets. Almost immediately I caught a glimpse of another bird strange to my Northern eyes, the anhinga, otherwise known as the water turkey or snakebird. To me the adjective which best describes that bird is "narrow." His back was long and slim, his tail, nearly a foot in length, seemed scarcely two inches wide, while his long attenuated black body gave him a strange, spearlike effect. The anhinga's conventional flight is three flaps and a soar. Usually when alarmed he circles up and up until a mere speck in the sky, but at other times the versatile bird will dive and swim under water like a fish.

Just beyond the first anhinga, my guide, a celebrated bear-hunter, Pungie Slaughter by name, lost for a time the winding, tangled waterway which he had been following like a clue through the maze of the Swamp, and we found ourselves confronted by a wall of shrouded cypresses. Zigzagging in and out between their trunks, we suddenly shot into a tiny, hidden lake, perhaps forty feet across, so encircled by the close-set trees that we never suspected its presence until we were floating on its smooth water. There it lay like a great aquamarine set in platinum, and it gleamed so lonely and lovely that I like to believe that no one else has ever seen it, save we two.

For a long time we floated in silence in the golden

afternoon light that filtered through the ghost-gray Spanish moss. Then, as at last we reluctantly turned our boat toward the hidden entrance through which we had come, from the farther bank of that still, green pool a song bubbled out full of crystalline runs and trills, yet with a loud ringing sweetness in it which reminded me of the song of the Northern water thrush, as I have heard him sing in lonely forests from the tangle of roots of some overturned tree where he had made his nest. Yet the song which I heard on the bank of that hidden lake was not that of any thrush. There were strange cadences in its depths that I have never heard in the music of any other bird, and it ended in a wild strain of the same kind which "charm'd magic casements . . . in faery lands forlorn" for another sweet singer so many years ago.

For a long time we both sat still as stones, hoping to glimpse the unknown bird, but he kept out of sight in the tangle of undergrowth which stretched away before us. Then, even as I feared that he had gone, the singer showed himself in a tangle of cane at the water's edge. His bill bewrayed him as a warbler, but not one which I had ever seen before. For a minute he reminded me of the worm-eating warbler with its striped head, but this bird had a white stripe over the eye, and I finally identified him as the Swainson warbler, that rare bird which Dr. Bachman found near Charleston in the thirties, at the same time that he discovered the other warbler which bears his name. Like the Bachman, the Swainson for many years was never seen again, and remained practically unknown until

rediscovered in the eighties. This one was grayish brown in color, with a reddish-brown crown, while the broad white line over and through his eye was his most obvious field mark.

The setting sun gleamed through the trees like a vast incandescent ruby as we approached the end of our journey. Crossing the last wide stretch of open marsh, we came to a dark clump of cypress trees. Swinging around the largest one, we found ourselves at the beginning of a hidden waterway hardly broader than the width of the boat, which had been cut through the undergrowth and along which we pushed our little craft for over a mile until we reached Secret Island, one of the most beautiful of all the known islands of the Swamp.

As we landed, a mocking bird sang his afternoon song, the most delicious melody which I have ever heard one of those great performers give. I counted nine distinct staves of his song before he began to repeat, nor did he deign to imitate any other bird. His florid, sweet song reminded me of the Carolina wren, the brown thrasher, and the cardinal grosbeak, yet with a phrasing and beauty all its own.

Before the bird had finished singing, Uncle Billy, the caretaker of Secret Island, came out to welcome us. He was a little man less than five feet in height, with a martial white moustache, bristling white hair, a pair of wistful blue eyes, and a soft voice, and for months at a time lived in the Swamp without seeing a human face. Almost immediately we became fast friends. He had a tiny cabin about a hundred yards from the little

bungalow between the two live oaks, where I was to stay, and there he, Pungie, and I pooled our knowledge of cooking and produced some very respectable meals.

"No, suh," said Uncle Billy, as we sat around his little cookstove after supper, "I don't have no time to get lonely here. There's always so much doin' with the birds comin' an' goin' an' the flowers a-bloomin' an' the different animiles of the island. Sometimes it seems as if I could hardly keep up with 'em all. Yes, suh," he went on, "I 've lived in the Swamp all my life an' I reckon I 'll die here. Onct I went away an' stayed a long, long time to see if I could get used to livin' outside, but I was n't happy a single minute till I got back."

"How long did you stay away, Uncle Billy?" I inquired.

"Two days, suh," he answered.

As we all sat together on a little bench in front of his cabin, while the soft dark spread like a slow stain across the marsh, I could see the belt of Orion, that mighty hunter, gleaming overhead, with Saiph the Sword Star shining at its side, while below, Sirius gleamed green in the fell jaw of the Dog. Then, well below that constellation, I glimpsed an unknown star close to the edge of the horizon, and for the first time in my life looked upon great Canopus, that wild, blue-white star of the desert which led Mahomet out to conquer half a world. Only in our southernmost states can it be seen.

While we were talking, a company of Florida barred owls began to hoot in the distance, their notes sounding like the deep-toned bay of some great dog — "who-

who-who-who-who-ah." All at once they broke into a perfect chorus of ghastly shrieks, like that company of fiends which Christian heard in the distance as he was crossing the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Then, across the narrow island, which is only half a mile wide, from the black depths of the Swamp came a deep booming bellow with a snoring note at the end, an indescribably wild, menacing, arrogant sound.

"That's an old bull 'gator," explained Uncle Billy. "He's the biggest thing in the Swamp, an' listen to him say so," and once again the ground fairly trembled under the deep-toned roar of the great saurian, the challenge of the reptile to the mammal, almost as menacing as the roar of a lion.

At last it was time for me to turn in.

"Wait a minute an' I 'll light a lantern for you," said the old man.

"I don't need a lantern, Uncle Billy," I assured him. "It's only a hundred yards to go."

"Son," said Uncle Billy, earnestly, "it ain't far, but if you go without a lantern you're liable never to get there. Do you see that chap on the wall?" and he pointed out to me the skin of a magnificent diamond-back rattler as wide as both of my hands, with twenty-one rattles and a button. "Well, suh," he continued, "them babies do their huntin' at night. I was goin' along after dark on the same path you're goin' to take, when I heard a rattlin'. It seemed to come from all sides o' me, an' I stood like I was froze an' yelled my head off for Rid Chesser, who was stoppin' with me. He came out with a torch, an' there, not a yard in

front o' me, was coiled up the snake who owned that skin. Rid, he came as fast as he could, but if you leave it to me, he was over twenty years a-gettin' there. He hit the ol' snake a clip with his torch an' bruk his back. If I 'd a moved one inch after that old-timer's alarm clock started, I 'd be six feet underground to-night."

"Yes," Pungie advised me, "you take a lantern, an' when you go through that patch o' dwarf palmetto you step kind o' high an' proud."

Needless to say, I carried that lantern and probably stepped higher and prouder and slower than any man who ever visited Secret Island.

Just as I reached the little house where I was to sleep, there was a glow in the dim lavender sky, and very slowly the rim of a dull orange moon thrust its way above the ghostly live oaks. As it rose higher in the sky the trees were silhouetted against the sepia and silver water, and a still, unearthly beauty spread like a mist over the whole landscape.

As I sat on the top step of the porch and stared unbelievingly at the loveliness spread out before me, the same mocking bird who had welcomed me at twilight began to sing low and sleepily. Then, as the moon climbed the sky, his song became louder, and I fell asleep that night in the pale gold moonlight with his wild, sweet cadences thrilling in my ears.

Early the next morning, just as dawn began to glow through the shrouded trees, I was awakened by another song, entirely different from that of the mocker, and in its way much more appealing. From the top of a great slash pine close to the house came a pure strain

of exquisite tenderness. The sound had all of the silver, flutelike quality of that song of the field sparrow which floats across darkening pastures in the North. In it too was something of the pathos and spiritual quality which one hears in the song of the hermit thrush. Hurrying into my clothes, I slipped out of doors and identified the unknown singer as a pine-woods sparrow, one of the most beautiful singers of all his large family. As the light became stronger he flew away, and I heard him only that one morning, but his limpid, crystal-clear song is among my best memories of the Swamp.

On our way across the prairie that day, a long dark animal rushed into the water from a little island. Its heavily furred body was so sinuous as to seem to flow along the ground as it shot through the bushes. Pungie identified it as an otter, and for a long time we pursued it by the line of air bubbles rising through the shallow water beneath which it swam.

As the sun rose higher and the marsh warmed up, Pungie suddenly pointed his finger toward a dim black mass showing in the bleached grass at the edge of a pool some ten feet across. I focused my field glasses on the spot and with difficulty made out the outlines of a huge, serrated body, black as death. There was something abhorrent to me in the monstrous figure — perhaps an instinct handed down from the ages when mammals were fugitives and weaklings among the dragons of the prime.

As we came closer, I could see that the eyes of the great 'gator were closed. Dipping his pole into the water without a sound, Pungie drove the boat swiftly

forward. Suddenly, when we were not more than thirty feet away, a turtle slipped off a log into the water with a splash. At the sound, two murky, fathomless eyes opened in the alligator's head and stared at us inscrutably. Then the crocodilian raised itself from the ground on four bowed legs, with an awkwardness which disguised the real swiftness of its movement.

Once I saw a toad approach an unsuspecting insect. Instead of hopping, it stalked forward on bent legs with a stealthy, swift, menacing movement. As I watched the alligator move, he reminded me of a great hunting toad. The body was carried high on bent, tense legs which could shoot it forward with unexpected swiftness, and as I looked I was glad that I was not within reach of those black jaws.

In another instant the great reptile had reached the edge of the pool and slipped into it with hardly more of a splash than a musk-rat would have made. For a moment the end of his muzzle and his two protruding eyes showed above the water, and then disappeared.

Our next meeting with this dark king of the marshland was out on the open water, when we saw what seemed to be two knots on a sunken log some distance ahead.

"That's a big ol' he-one," said Pungie, and, as we approached, the black dots suddenly disappeared. Immediately Pungie stooped until his head was close to the water, and gave several deep grunts, an imitation of the love notes of an amorous alligator. At once the ominous knobs showed again, but went under as the boat reached them.

"Let me take the pole and give him a poke. Perhaps he'll come up again," I said rashly.

"Now I would n't never go pokin' no ol' bull 'gator. Howsomever, do as you like," objected Pungie.

With the idiocy of ignorance and relying upon divers authorities which state that alligators never attack humans, I thrust the pole down until it grated upon the ridged back of the monster hidden beneath the brown water, hoping that he might come to the surface again. He did! As I prodded the ridged back, it was as if a depth bomb had suddenly exploded beside me, as, with a tremendous splash, the bent, ten-foot body of the alligator shot above the surface like a black bass breaking water. I had one glimpse of a huge lashing tail, and then two grim jaws clashed together so close to the boat that they splashed water all over my face as the great 'gator fell back with a crash, nearly swamping our tiny craft.

For once Pungie showed speed.

"This ain't no place fer you an' me," he exclaimed, snatching the push-pole from my nerveless hands, and with a mighty shove he shot the boat a dozen yards away from the mass of foam and bubbles the alligator had left behind. Fifty yards farther on he came to a halt and regarded me severely.

"Don't you never do that again," he commanded. "That ol' bull was snappin' fer your hands. If he 'd caught 'em he 'd a pulled you under an' rolled you until you was drownded dead. He 'd a hid you up under some bank until you softened up a bit an' then he 'd a et you. Don't you never poke no 'gator again."

"Well, Pungie," I gasped, "if you feel that way about it, I never will"—and I never have.

Pungie told me of a similar experience with a porpoise.

"They're like 'gators," he said; "kind o' sudden. Once when I was fishin' with Zeb Kahler at Limb Sound we seed two porpoises comin' toward us. They was goin' under the boat like they allus do, an' I told Zeb I was goin' to jab one of 'em with the oar. 'Don't you,' says he—but I did. Each one of 'em was about ten feet long, an' I poked the front one right in the middle o' his fat back. The next thing we knew we were lyin' in a mud flat fifty feet away, with our boat upside down beyond us. Both o' them darn porpoises had rose up under us an' shot us through the air, boat an' all, like as if we'd been blowed up by a torpedo."

The very next day after my experience with the alligator I had another reptilian adventure that was even more trying to my nerves. Pungie and I had been searching for the trail which led to Bugaboo Island, which was reputed to be haunted and where the ivory-billed woodpecker was said to be found. I was sitting in the bow and bent my head as Pungie pushed the boat through a fringe of bushes. Even as I did so there was a thud behind me, as if someone had dropped a piece of heavy fire hose into the boat, and I heard Pungie give a gasp. Then at my back came that sound which no man born of woman may hear unmoved—the fierce, thick hiss of a snake. Glancing over my shoulder, I saw the head of a monstrous serpent rising from the bottom of the boat not a foot away. As I stared helplessly at it,

the grim mouth slowly opened, showing the white lining which marks the dreaded cottonmouth moccasin. The snake had been basking in the upper branches of a bush and, startled by our approach, had tried to slip into the water, only to land in our boat.

It was the largest water snake that I have ever seen and must have been fully five feet in length and thicker around than my forearm, dingy brown in color with dark blotches showing faintly along its back.

I had nothing in my hands, and my legs were so cramped that if I tried to stand up I should undoubtedly fall out of the boat. Moreover, the snake was so close to me that any attempt on my part to move would probably be met by a dart from the curved, movable fangs I could see faintly showing in the white gum of the upper jaw.

I sat still, very still, watching the snake over my shoulder. It was so close to me that I could plainly see the curious pit between the nostril and the eye, which is found also in the rattlesnake and the copperhead and which gives their fatal family the name of pit vipers. The glassy, lidless eyes with their curious oval pupil, the hall mark of a venomous serpent, had an expression of cold menace quite as threatening as the fierce glare that shows in the eyes of the larger carnivora when enraged.

A diamond-backed rattler, with its higher tension and more irritable temperament, in a similar situation would undoubtedly have bitten me. A moccasin, however, although it will open its mouth and hiss when approached, rarely strikes unless actually touched. Once

the great cold-blood turned its hissing head toward Pungie, who gripped his pole like a pole vaulter ready to break a record.

For what seemed to me a long time I sat motionless, until at last the menacing mouth with its white satin lining closed, the great heart-shaped head thrust itself over the gunwale of the boat, and the monstrous body flowed after it smooth as oil, and, with scarcely a ripple, disappeared in the water.

"I don't mind a bear," confided Pungie to me a few minutes later, "though some folks get flustered when a big he-one charges, grittin' his teeth an' smashin' down the bresh. A big ol' rattlesnake or a moccasin, howsomever, gets my goat every time, they look so kind o' unfriendly like."

On our way back we came to a dead cypress, white as bleached bone. On one of its limbs, perched in a row, sat six black vultures, my first sight of that grim bird. Although smaller than the turkey vulture and with less expanse of wing, the black vulture is yet a heavier bird. The sextette showed no signs of alarm even when we came close, but sat regarding us fixedly out of their red eyes like a dark company of witches.

Beyond the vultures we found a shaded pool from which Pungie dipped me a drink of the celebrated Okefinokee water, a rich golden brown in color, with a curiously soft, spicy taste. After drinking it for a few days I came to like it better than any other water. In the early part of the century, captains of sailing vessels used to fill their casks from the upper reaches of St. Mary's River, which rises in the marsh, and at

the end of a two years' voyage the water would be as pure and potable as when first used.

My days and nights on the hidden island and in the heart of the great marsh passed all too swiftly. There was fishing, such fishing as I had never expected to find on earth — large-mouthed bass, jack, bream, blackfish, and perch. The flowers and the trees were new to me and all strangely beautiful, and everywhere were the birds of the South — red-bellied woodpeckers, blue-gray gnatcatchers, prothonotary warblers all gray and gold, and a score of others whose songs and habits were a continual delight.

Then, all too soon, came the day when I had to leave those lonely wilds and go back to live among the tame folk.

"I wisht, I wisht that you'd spend a month here with me," said Uncle Billy, wistfully. "We 'd have such a good time together watchin' the birds an' flowers an' critters."

"I 'll come back, Uncle Billy," I promised.

"Yes," he said. "Once drink swamp water an' you 'll allus come back, but — I may not be here when you come."

III

THE QUEST OF THE WILSON WARBLER

It was a day of mist and snow. Down through a forgotten part of Philadelphia I picked my way by courts and streets where no English was spoken. Sidewalks were crowded with booths on which raw squid, black cheeses, and other strange foods were being sold.

I passed Carpenter's Corner, where six streets of roaring traffic meet at a gaunt, brick shot-tower of another century, and came at last to where Old Swede's Church with shingled spire and triple-pointed arrow peers out from among its graves.

The broken windows of a deserted factory stared down at the little churchyard like the empty eyeholes of a skull, and a mass of dead vines hung from the brick walls and trailed across the ancient boxwood.

Surrounded by sagging tombstones, I at last found the grave which I sought. It was marked by a box-shaped monument of crumbling stone, and the falling snow covered the inscription as fast as I could brush it off. Yet I made out that it marked the last resting place of that unresting one, Alexander Wilson, the Father of American Ornithology, who "died of a dysentery in his forty-seventh year." The snow came down so fast that I could only make out the first and last words of a long Latin inscription which began with *ingenio* and ended with *doctis*.

The epitaph failed to set forth that Wilson, without money, education, or friends, in ten years' time collected, described, and painted nearly all of the birds of Eastern America. Then, toiling terribly, he raised the money to publish the fruit of his labors in nine volumes before he died as the result of swimming a river with his clothes on to collect his last rare bird.

I was mistaken when I said that he had no friends. Before his death, Alexander Wilson had made two hundred and sixty-five friends, little brothers of the air, whose lives he studied and with whom he lived for long years in the wilderness. Some of these bear his name to this day, such as the Wilson petrel, snipe, tern, plover, phalarope, and the veery or Wilson thrush, whose heartstrings are a lute.

Of them all, however, there was one whom he loved beyond the rest, that tiny, brilliant bird still known as the Wilson warbler.

It was on the twentieth day of the May after I had visited Wilson's grave that I first met his best friend. That day three other bird lovers and myself were engaged in our favorite game of trying to break our record of birds seen and heard in one day between dawn and dark.

Some of the pleasantest memories that I have of life are those day-long walks in the spring, full of little adventures with new bird arrivals, full of good talk and good fellowship and wonderful meals beside bubbling springs in the heart of the dim green woods.

We met in the dawn-dusk on the campus of a little college where in the shrubbery and among the great

trees we were accustomed to find great treasure in birds before any of the students were up.

That morning, as we followed a path bordered by viburnum bushes, on whose flat, blue berries the birds feed in winter, we heard a loud song, "Chip, chip, chippy-chippy-chippy." A moment later we saw the singer, a bird with a gray crown who looked much like a red-eyed vireo. No vireo, however, could sing such a song or open its beak so wide. For a moment we all stared at the newcomer perplexedly. Then the dean of our quartette suddenly announced, reverently, "The Tennessee warbler"; and sure enough it was.

It was the first time that any of us had ever met that rare, quiet-colored bird so often overlooked in migration and about whose breeding and nesting habits at that time very little was known, and we spent a long, delightful quarter-hour in studying every detail of his appearance and song.

The Tennessee was the first of a fine list. We identified bird after bird of the more common varieties, picking up a humming bird at the usual station, a pink horse-chestnut tree, and finding a little wave of flycatchers in a pin oak, from which we identified the least and the Acadian or green-crested, distinguishable only by the ashy-white wing bars of the former and the buffy ones of the latter. Moreover, the least was kind enough to mention his name a couple of times, "Chebec, chebec."

One by one we picked up the vireos: the red-eyed everywhere; a late solitary with his blue head, passing silently through the top of a great tree; the warbling

vireo singing his machine-like little song, which so much resembles that of the purple finch, from the top of a willow; the white-eyed saying explosively, "Chip, whee-oo," in a swampy thicket; and the yellow-throated singing his alto notes in a huge white-oak tree.

That tree, with a spread of a hundred feet, stood by itself near a little lane which led to the old Friend's Meeting House, and as always, was a treasure tree for bird lovers. In its branches that day we found a cardinal grosbeak, his crest and breast all crimson, while near him was his northern brother, the rose-breasted, black-and-white with the rose-red stain which has given him his name, singing his soft warble. Near by, a scarlet tanager, a flaming coal among the green leaves, sang like a hoarse robin. Then, to add to the riot of color in that tree, an orange-and-black oriole called down his contralto joy notes from the upper branches, while on one of the topmost twigs an indigo bird, deep blue all over, sang his silly little song, and a sunshine-yellow goldfinch with velvet-black wings gave his sweet canary-like call.

By the time we left the campus and that magic tree, we had a list of sixty different birds and the morning was still young. On the way to Fox Valley we heard the hollow notes of the yellow-billed cuckoo, and in the little valley itself caught a glimpse of one whose tail feathers ended in small white spots instead of the large blotches which are the field mark of the yellow-billed, and with great joy we scored the first black-billed cuckoo which any of us had ever seen in Haverford.

As we passed through Fern Valley, a large chestnut-

brown bird sprang up from beside the brook with a hoarse cry and flapped off with slow strokes of its broad yellowish-brown wings, and we scored the American bittern, who likes to thrust his yellow bill straight skyward and pretend to be a stake among the long grasses. Later in the day we heard him give his bubbling, subterranean boom, like pouring water out of a great cask underground.

When we came to the abandoned railroad which makes a convenient path for us through good bird country, we saw on a bare patch of ground a little flock of sparrows feeding. Most of them were whitethroats with the white stripes across their heads, but one seemed different from all the others. His head did not slope back like the rest, and the stripe across it was of a broader white, and there was no yellow line above his eye.

"White-crowned sparrow!" we shouted with one accord, and so it was, the first and last which I have ever seen, for, although not a rare bird in other places, its migration lanes do not pass near Philadelphia.

For a long time we watched this straggler with the utmost interest and delight. Out of the sixteen million or so minutes which go to make up a long life, those which are marked with a new bird will always stand out in my memory.

We crossed Darby Creek on a railroad trestle fifty feet above the stream, wondering, as always, how we should feel if we suddenly saw an engine coming around the curve. Fortunately for us, no trains have run on that road for many a long year, and we reached the farther bank in safety.

There we met the great warbler wave of the day. The trees overhanging the creek were filled with flashing, many-colored little birds, and everywhere sounded their tiny songs. There were parulas, myrtles, black-throated blues and greens, yellow warblers, magnolias, Canadas, black-and-whites, blackpolls, with their high glassy notes, chestnut-sided, with their white cheeks —altogether we identified no less than fourteen varieties in a half-mile stretch. Among them were two that always stand out from the others. The first was the Blackburnian, with his red-orange breast gleaming like a coal of fire as he flitted among the leaves giving his wire-thin notes. The other was the rare Cape May, that brilliant, beautiful little warbler who has a black crown, an orange-brown patch behind his eye, and a brilliant yellow-and-black breast. The Cape May was not new to any of us, but its coming was always an event. Taken with the Tennessee, this meant that we had met two rare warblers in one day.

We were following a tiny hidden valley with a deep spring at its upper end from which trickled a little stream bordered by willow bushes. It was among these that I saw for the first time Wilson's dearest friend. As he passed me, moving quickly among the feathery green leaves, with his brilliant yellow underparts, he seemed a bird of burnished gold. Then, as he moved his head, I saw the little blackcap which Wilson loved to paint. He was about the size of the Cape May, a little below the average of most of the warblers. Once he stopped and sang, and his song was something like that of the yellow warbler, but shorter, and ended in a spray of rapid notes which are hard to describe.

The whole personality of the bird was so lively, engaging, and debonair that on the spot I conceived an affection for him which has lasted me ever since, and I could easily see why Wilson, that sombre Scotchman, cared more for that bird than for any other.

After lunch, with a list of eighty each, we separated. Two went home, but two of us elected to stay out all day. During the afternoon I added a kingfisher, black duck, broad-winged hawk, and a bay-breasted warbler, that sombre, beautiful bird whose colors are black and buff and bay, to my list, making it an eighty-four. My friend found a hooded warbler, a chickadee, and a cowbird, which gave him an eighty-three. Another rival who had spent the day in a canoe on the Rancocas Creek turned in an eighty-two, and my eighty-four was the best score recorded around Philadelphia for that year. The high light of the list to me, however, was the green-and-gold black-capped Wilson warbler.

It was a gray-and-silver day full of slants of warm spring rain when next I met my golden friend. Three of us were hunting through a bog in northern New Jersey for the nest of a brown creeper, that gray-and-brown little bird with the long curved beak who is always spiraling up trees and then flying down them, and who nests under loose strips of bark on water-killed maples in the depths of the most disagreeable morasses which he can conveniently find.

Beside a sluggish stream I watched a chat with a lovely golden breast slip his sharp bill through the sticky web of a nest of tent caterpillars and swallow such a rapid succession of wriggling worms that I

feared for his health. Theretofore I had always supposed that the cuckoo was the only bird who fed upon that scourge of our apple and cherry trees.

Suddenly I heard in the far distance the ethereal notes of the hermit thrush, high and indescribably sweet, like the song of some disembodied spirit. Then close at hand sounded the deep organ tones of the wood thrush. It is rarely that one has a chance to hear these two thrushes singing together, although once at Tyler's Pond in Goshen, Connecticut, I heard a wood thrush, a hermit, and a veery all singing at the same time.

That day in the marsh after the thrush duet, a Maryland yellowthroat sang, "Witchery, witchery, witchery," and then came the rarer buzzing note of the golden-winged warbler.

Several times from the depths of the swamp I heard a call which sounded like that of a flicker, save that it was wilder and ended with an abrupt "yuk-o." As it sounded for the third time, I thought to myself that if I were farther north I should certainly believe that I were listening to the call of that magnificent bird, the northern pileated woodpecker.

A moment later, and I saw in the distance the flapping of great black-and-white wings, and a bird nearly as large as a crow, with a scarlet head and crest, alighted on a dead tree. There, before my delighted eyes, was the woodpecker of whom I had been thinking, although I should have declared that no pileated woodpecker had ever been seen in New Jersey.

The best was yet to come. As I watched him, he flew

across the stream and alighted beside a hole in a dead black-ash stub about thirty feet from the ground. There before my astonished eyes was, perhaps, the first nest of a pileated woodpecker ever reported from New Jersey. A few moments later there was a rush of wings over my head, and the female pileated flew into the hole. She had the scarlet crest, but lacked the red crown and stripe along the cheek.

I called to my companions, and we gloated over that nest for a long time. Urged on by the Collector, with the aid of a pair of climbers and a poison-ivy vine, I tried in vain to reach and rob that nest, and as we finally left the tree the great woodpeckers joined in a rollicking, derisive chorus, "Yuk, yuk, yuk, yuk-o."

Leaving the others, I followed the slow, brown stream through the very heart of the marsh until I came to a dry bank made of the buttressed roots of trees covered with moss and white with wild lilies of the valley. Close beside me was a clump of regal ferns with their flat, light green leaves.

A flock of siskin passed by, giving sweet canary-like calls; a black duck quacked downstream; in the far distance a red-shouldered hawk squealed, while everywhere sounded the high, sweet pipings of the hylas. Then a ruffed grouse drummed like distant thunder, and from overhead floated down the liquid, lovely warble of a purple finch.

In front of me was a tussock, pale green with new grass and starred with tiny white violets with crimson-lake hearts. Among the ferns I saw growing a stalk of that rare orchid, the pink-and-white lady-slipper.

PILEATED WOODPECKER

It was not yet in blossom, but its wide, ridged green leaves, so much like those of the marsh hellebore, were unmistakable, and I wished that I could come back in June and see the pure white cross of its sepals gleam through the dusk above its rose-red lip fluted like a sea shell.

For long I lazed on the bank while my industrious friends scoured the marsh in vain for brown creepers.

When at last I stood up, I struck a little tree with my shoulder and dislodged a red tree bat who had been hanging head down by his recurved thumb nails waiting for his hour and power, which come in the dusk of the early twilight after the flight of the little brown bat and just before that of the black bat. He had a red-brown little face, grizzled with white and hideous as a gargoyle. His wings were mahogany-red, and he opened a crimson mouth filled with needle-like teeth and squeaked and hissed indignantly at me until I hung him up again.

Then, at last, just as I was moving away, I saw my best friend of the year flitting toward me through the rose-red haze of the unfolding leaves of a swamp maple. His breast gleamed like burnished gold, while his velvet cap seemed to have been just brushed, it was so smooth and black. His yellow-green back shone in the sun as he regarded me for a moment out of his round black eyes. Then he came nearer, alighting not six feet away, caught a huge May fly, which he gulped down apologetically, and with another quick glance at me was gone.

Whatever else happened, for me the spring was a

success now that once again I had met my Wilson warbler.

After those tantalizing annual glimpses of the Wilson warbler on his way north, there came at last a year when I had a chance to visit him in his own home. My friend the Collector had discovered a little tract of land on the Canadian coast where a score or so of rare birds nested, including the Tennessee and Wilson warblers. He had invited two or three eminent ornithologists to go with him on a collecting trip. By some miracle I was allowed to tag along after those learned pundits during one of the treasure weeks of my life. How many of those refuges from work and worry I have in my memory, and how I should like to gather again from the ends of the earth, and from beyond the dark river which bounds our lives, old-time friends, and live over many happy days with them in the wilderness.

After days and nights of travel by land and sea, we reached at last the little village nearest the fishing club which was to be our headquarters. There we were met by a boy with a buckboard and a discouraged-looking horse, who was to drive us ten miles through the woods to our camp.

A quarter of a mile out from the little village, and our adventures began. In a sphagnum bog beside the winding road we heard so many strange songs that we stopped the horse — without any difficulty — and waded in to investigate.

"Chip, chip, chippy-chippy-chippy," and there was the Tennessee warbler, met at last in his own home.

A vireo song, like a languid red-eyed, turned out to be that of a Philadelphia vireo. He was smaller even than the white-eyed or the solitary, his underparts were faintly tinged with yellow, and — I had never seen one before. A slow song-sparrow song, and there was the Lincoln finch, another fire-new bird for me. Then someone overhead sang, "Chickaree, chickaree, chickaree, chick," followed by an indescribable laughing song. The singer turned out to be the ruby-crowned kinglet, who in his homeland sings an entirely different song from the one he uses during migration. All around us were the flowers of early spring, trailing arbutus, creeping snowberry, and the dwarf cornel. An olive-sided flycatcher shouted, "Hip, three cheers, hip, three cheers," which expressed our sentiments exactly.

By twilight we had reached the clubhouse at the end of a wind-swept point, and found there the rest of the party, who had gone up while the snow was still on the ground to locate the nest of the Canada jay and the Arctic three-toed woodpecker.

The next morning we were up before dawn and, after a snack of bread and cheese, crowded ourselves into a long-suffering canoe and paddled up the river until we reached the burned-over slope of a mountain. Up through that abomination of desolation we tramped, where the powdered charcoal rose in clouds and the mosquitoes stung and the black flies bit until the blood ran down our perspiring faces.

Halfway up we saw what seemed to be an orange-colored fungus growing out of the side of a dead maple tree. It turned out to be the bright patch on the fore-

head of a male Arctic three-toed woodpecker who was peering out of his hole after taking his turn at brooding the set of four eggs within. He had a white throat, a jet-black back, and a long fine bill. The female was nowhere in sight. Probably, as the Collector remarked while he stored away the four eggs in his box, she would never trust her mate again when she came back and found what had happened.

On the top of the mountain we found a sphagnum bog bordered by thick woods, with small trees and bushes growing across its surface. As we stepped into the dripping moss a yellow-bellied flycatcher drawled his call like the wood peewee, save that the final note went up instead of down, a yellow-palm warbler gave a jingling little song, and olive-backed thrushes sang from the woods songs which sounded like a combination of those of the wood thrush and the veery.

"Name the nest you want me to find first," I remarked boastfully, plunging knee-deep into the cold sphagnum.

"Try the yellow-palm," the Collector suggested sarcastically. "It's not been found for years."

"Certainly," I said obligingly, not knowing whether that little warbler with a yellow breast streaked with red nested in a tree or on the ground.

My scientific companions moved expertly through the marsh armed with long sticks with which they tapped likely-looking places in the fond hope that a nesting bird would fly out. My methods were cruder. Wallowing through the dripping moss, I came to a tangle of grass beneath a small spruce tree, just the

spot which, it seemed to me, an intelligent bird would select for her home. Parting the stems carefully, I looked down into a nest made of grass, lined with porcupine hair and feathers, and containing four rose-white eggs wreathed with reddish brown at the larger end. I had no idea what kind of nest it was, but I summoned the Collector with a lordly gesture.

"Here," said I, "is your yellow-palm warbler's nest" — and sure enough it was. He came, saw, and was conquered. Kneeling down in the wet moss, he studied it reverently for a long time.

"All my life," he said, "I've looked for a yellow-palm's nest and never found one, and here an ignorant chap like you comes along and finds one in five minutes. How do you do it?"

"Oh, it's just a knack," said I airily. I spoke more truly than I knew, for, incredible as it may seem, during that week I found no less than six nests of the yellow-palm warbler — and was the only one who did. I found them in all kinds of unlikely places. One morning, just as we started out, I stepped into a little bog beside the road. The Collector called after me not to waste any time there, as he had explored every inch of it. Almost immediately I found in the side of a tussock another yellow-palm's nest containing four eggs and lined with gray feathers which curled beautifully over its rim. Again, in a high, dry clearing I found another — a place in which, as the Collector remarked exasperatedly, no reputable yellow-palm warbler would ever think of nesting.

That first morning was the beginning of a wonder-

ful week for me. I can boast of it now, for it never came again. Once in a lifetime the red gods give even a novice a chance, and that was mine. I found the nests of the hermit thrush, the eggs gleaming from the green moss like great turquoises; those of magnolia warblers, lined with red-and-black roots fine as hair; eggs of the piping plover, the color of wet sand, in little hollows lined with bits of broken shell on the bare beach; spotted sandpipers' nests, terns' and olive-backed thrushes', in low trees, made of moss, with four blue-and-tawny eggs inside.

On the day that I found my fourth yellow-palm's nest, lined that time with black grackle feathers, with five eggs, the most beautiful of them all, I felt that I had earned a holiday, and begged the loan of the power boat to go codfishing in the bay.

"No," said the Collector firmly, "you have come up here to collect eggs, not to catch fish. Find us the bay-breasted warbler's nest, and we 'll let you go."

Those other greedy egg hunters backed him up, and I was powerless. No one had found the nest of a bay-breasted that year, and although I knew that it built in a tree I had no hopes of ever locating one. Ground birds were evidently my specialty. The next morning at daybreak I was sitting sulkily on a log behind the camp, eating my breakfast of Dutch bread and waiting for the three eminent scientists to get together their climbing irons, nesting boxes, rubber boots, and the other paraphernalia of their nefarious calling. As I munched the dry bread, a bird alighted on a limb just over my head, all bay and black and white. Even as I

stared at her, she ran along the limb like a mouse and slipped into a nest made of tiny twigs of usnea moss lined with black roots, so beautifully hidden that I never should have seen it if she had not shown it to me herself.

Immediately I returned to the gun room, which my friends were just leaving, and announced that I was going fishing.

"Not until you find a bay-breasted's nest," was the Collector's ultimatum. Then came a splendid moment. Taking him by the arm, followed by the other two, I conducted him to the nest. It was not thirty feet from camp, and in a tree under which he had walked every day for weeks. Moreover, it contained four eggs, cream-white, clouded with red, the most beautiful warbler eggs that I have ever seen. That moment was indeed for me the high-water mark of the trip. Even the Collector admitted my merit — at least, he said I was a fool for luck — and sent me out into the Bay of Fundy with a guide and a power boat. There I saw harbor seals, black, brown, cream, and spotted, and caught great cod and haddock, heavy as iron safes and just about as gamy, until the lure of bird's-nesting called me back to the shore again.

Finally the last day of the golden week came, all too soon. We had identified one hundred and seven birds in that northern paradise. Many of them were entirely new to me, such as the gyrfalcon, the Arctic three-toed woodpecker, the pigeon hawk, kittiwake, gannet, Canada jay, and Canada spruce grouse. I had found a dozen or so different nests, some of them rare

indeed, but that of the Wilson still evaded me. That last morning we hunted Stymer's Bog, where I believe more rare birds nest than anywhere else in Eastern America. All about me I heard the two songs of the Wilson, one like that of a yellow warbler and the other more like that of a chipping sparrow, yet hunt as I would I could find no trace of his nest, although I caught glimpses now and then of his golden breast and black cap.

Once a Wilson snipe volplaned down from mid-sky with a wing song like an Æolian harp and disappeared in the marshes. As we were hunting for his nest, I parted the grasses which arched over a tussock near to where a Wilson warbler was singing. Deep in its very heart I found a little cup of yellow grass containing two white eggs with an irregular aureole of sepia spots at the larger end. For one glorious moment we all thought that it was the long-desired nest of the Wilson warbler. A closer examination of it, however, showed dry leaves woven in with the grass, the sign and seal of the Maryland yellow-throat, that little warbler who wears a black domino, and whose nest, although well hidden, is not especially rare.

Years after that trip I bought Falls Point, in Maine, sight unseen, which juts out into Sullivan Bay and takes its name from the tides which twice a day roar like a battle as they rush in and out of a narrow inlet.

Last summer I motored up to inspect my new possession. That night I walked out on the Point at high-water slack, and there was no sound to be heard from the motionless water, which an hour later would be

a maelstrom of whirlpools and rapids where many a staunch boat had foundered in bygone years.

Along the beach little waves sobbed softly, "Ah-h, ah-h, ah-h," and the hemlocks in the twilight were vast black plumes against a pale gold sky, while the silver birches, becalmed against the dark green of the pines, seemed listening for the first ominous mutter of the Falls.

Then the newest of new moons showed like a silver thread against a patch of primrose which slowly darkened to a dusky violet, while the evening star flared like a lamp set out by Day to guide Night as she stole across the sea. One by one, pale, remote stars came out, and the west was a mass of molten copper inlaid with cool strips of turquoise and malachite. As it dimmed, the dark drifted down upon the world, heavy, velvet-soft, bejeweled with fireflies, and sweet with the scent of pine.

Now and then from the trees beyond the pits where the Indians used to trap moose in the old days came drowsy twitterings and snatches of bird song, and I highly resolved to explore every foot of my domain early the next morning and see what treasure of bird life I might have acquired with my land.

The next day I was up at dawn exploring the dark woods at the base of the Point with my oldest boy, who knows far more about birds than his father ever will. All about me were notes which usually I only hear during migration. There was the abrupt song of the Canada warbler, beginning always with a loud "chip," and that of the magnolia warbler, with his

yellow throat and sides, the shortest of all the warbler songs.

Here and there were dry, mossy banks carpeted with the fragrant twin flowers of the Linnæa, whose pale pink petals were stained a deep rose within. Once I heard a strange song which my boy finally identified as that of the smallest of our warblers, the parula, who wears a curious, copper-colored patch on his upper breast and has a bluish head, yellow throat, and white wing bars. Usually his song is a buzz, but that day he was evidently trying out a new number for his repertoire. As we came to a swampy part of the woods a Nashville warbler, who has an ashy head and yellow breast, was singing, "Sweeter, sweet-er, sweet," a song which begins like that of the redstart and ends like a chipping sparrow's. Then in a dense spruce I found my first nest of the day, an empty one made of pine twigs and moss, probably that of a cedar bird.

In the same tree and only about eight feet up, I found the newly built nest of a bay-breasted warbler, made of fine twigs and lined with roots with a few red stems of moss on the outside. The sombre, richly colored little bird was singing near by.

Suddenly, just ahead, I saw a female Cape May warbler with food in her bill, evidently on her way to feed her young in one of those rare nests, located in the tops of great trees, which have only recently been discovered. Although we looked long and carefully, it soon became evident that we were not to be

among the favored few who have found a Cape May warbler's nest.

Beyond the woods we crossed a tiny brook and entered a bog filled with sphagnum moss and bushes and tiny trees. My boy, who was leading the way, called back to me that a pair of Wilson warblers were scolding near where he stood. Then, as I climbed a dry bank to join him, my seven-year quest was over. Directly ahead of me under a tiny fir seedling I saw a little nest on the ground, a shallow cup of leaves and dry fern lined with yellow grass, black horsehair, and a few vivid-red moss stems. In it were three eggs of a light cream color spotted with bay and with a red-brown aureole at the larger end. It seemed to me almost certain that I had at last discovered the nest of a Wilson warbler, but in order to make sure we crossed the bog and came back. This time there was a bird on the nest, but when I was about seven feet away she slipped off so swiftly that I was unable to identify her. A second time we went through the same performance, but that time the bird came back and perched on a little bush not five feet away, unmistakably a Wilson warbler. Like the male, who came and sat beside her, she wore a little black cap, but her breast was not nearly so bright a yellow. At first the two scolded me softly, but in a few moments they stopped, evidently convinced that I meant them no harm. A moment later, as I stepped back from the nest, the female slipped into it again and, cuddling down over her eggs, regarded me trustingly out of her bright black eyes. Down through the summer air drifted a

rare and beautiful Artemis butterfly, and my last sight of the Wilson warbler's nest showed me the little mother brooding her dear-loved eggs while the exquisite white-banded butterfly waved his wings above her head, and her mate regarding her admiringly from a near-by bush.

IV

DESERT ISLAND

A HELIOTROPE and silver dawn deepened into apple-green above a bar of heavenly blue. For a moment sky, sea, and earth stood waiting. Then the orange-gold rim of the sun showed beyond the gray heaving waste, and another day had begun.

A ghost-white herring gull drifted overhead as I plunged into the soft, stinging water. It was good to be alive. That day four of us, who have adventured together many years among the wild folk, had forgathered at Cape May and were to explore a desert island where anything might happen.

The evening before we had spent on the porch of our old friend Walker Hand, the Native, whose ancestors had come as whalers to Cape May before William Penn founded Philadelphia or the Swedes had started their long-lost settlement on the Delaware. Straight, slim, with lank black hair and coal-black eyes, the Native showed his Indian blood, for his great-great-grandmother had been a princess of the Lenni-Lenape tribe. He told us that there are more families at Cape May whose ancestors crossed as pilgrims on the Mayflower than there are at Plymouth, since according to him all the best and brightest of said pilgrims immediately migrated to Cape May and became whalers.

It was the descendants of some of those pilgrims

who, in Revolutionary days, when the British fleet was anchored off Cape May, cut the ditch which runs from Lily Pond clear to the inlet to let in the salt water so that General Howe's soldiers might not use the pond for their water supply. He told us of the lonely place back on the dunes still called "Cow Pen," where his great-great-grandfather drove his cows to hide them from the British.

Then as always the talk turned to the wild folk to whom Cape May really belongs. We talked of the migrations in the fall, when the hawks — red-shouldered, red-tailed, sparrow, sharp-shinned, Cooper's, and marsh — arrive in vast flocks to prey upon the lesser migrants who stop to rest on the long point before venturing out over the Atlantic. At present there is a pest of alleged sportsmen who come down to shoot the hawks, which are not protected by law as they should be. These kill large quantities every year and have even learned to eat them like game.

When the talk turned to snakes Walker told us a fearsome tale of climbing up to look into a flicker's nest and having a blacksnake spring out of the hole right into his face one day; whereupon he climbed down with exceeding haste and, procuring an axe, chopped out the hole, killed the blacksnake, and found it full of young flickers. The largest blacksnake he had ever met measured six feet five and a half inches long and was pursuing a newly hatched chewink which, in spite of its youth, was making great bounds six feet in length in an effort to escape the black monster. This, with Walker's assistance, he finally did.

Another snake story Mr. Hand quite properly refused to tell himself, but brought in his mother, a dear old lady eighty-four years old and as straight as an arrow, who told us of a neighbor who, hearing a disturbance in his henhouse, went in and found a monster blacksnake among his chickens. When he tried to cut it in two with a shovel, without success, he found that it had swallowed a chair round over two feet long. We assured him that he did well to pass the responsibility for that story on to his mother.

Another henhouse story was of a tame crow which he once owned, and which had been taught, or had taught itself, to shout the words, "Hurrah, hurrah," in a loud, raucous tone. Whenever the crow felt downhearted it would solace itself by driving all the chickens out of the henhouse, so that several times a week the Native would have to rescue his fowls from their tormentor. One day he heard a great tumult in the henhouse and as usual hastened to the rescue. On entering the building he found the crow on its back, shouting "Hurrah, hurrah," at the top of its voice, with its claws clinched in the fur of a weasel which it was desperately trying to hold away from its throat.

The Native's last story of his adventurous henhouse was of a great horned owl which once invaded that sanctuary, and which he crippled with a shotgun and tried in vain to tame. It had a sense of hearing that was uncanny. He kept it in a box in the back of which was a nail hole. Sometimes when there was a gale of wind blowing away from the box he would creep up without making, as he thought, a sound, and peep

through the hole, but always the owl had heard him and was sitting up alert with its round, glaring eyes fixed on his through the hole. Sometimes he would feed it a dead rabbit, which it would skin with its hooked beak as neatly as a man would with a knife, eat a part of it, then turn the skin back and hide the rest under the straw.

His last nature anecdote was about a friend of his who found that winter at Cape May sixty-four garter snakes hibernating near a steam pipe in his greenhouse, which reminded me of an experience I had in Connecticut on the old family farm. The water supply of the farmhouse comes from a large spring. Last winter the water became very muddy. On bailing out the spring over a hundred leopard frogs were found buried in the mud at the bottom of it. They must have come from the surrounding brooks and meadows to hibernate there for the winter.

Then the talk turned to shooting, for the Native is one of the best shots at Cape May. He told us two anecdotes which amused us vastly.

One was about going with a friend to a field in which they knew a covey of quail was concealed. As they entered the lot they saw two other gunners, who had gone in ahead of them. With great presence of mind, Walker rushed up and ordered them out of the field, telling them that he did not propose to protect quail and have a lot of outside gunners come in and shoot them off. To this day he does not know who owned that lot.

The other story was about traveling for a couple of

stations on the local railroad with his dog, a large Irish setter, in the hunting season. One conductor would insist upon charging him for the dog. Finally Walker looked up the regulation of the railroad and found that lap dogs were exempt from any charge. The next time that he took that particular train he managed with some difficulty to persuade the setter to place itself on his lap, and then refused to make any payment for it. The conductor insisted that the regulation did not refer to Walker's setter.

"He 's a dog and he 's in my lap, therefore he 's a lap dog and I don't pay," Walker maintained stubbornly.

Then the talk turned to old Cape May characters. The Native told us of that old scoffer, Horres Haines, who, when he was dying, left instructions that he was to be buried in a hemlock coffin so that he could "go to hell a-snappin' an' a-cracklin'." He lies in a brick grave with a marble slab under a great black walnut tree on his old farm.

Then there was Bill Snowden, the colored Man Friday of the four doctors who in the old days practised at Cape May—Dr. Leech, Dr. Slaughter, Dr. Physic, and Dr. Butcher. Bill had one stock remark which always used to delight his employers. Whenever he was asked about the weather, Bill would always say, "Well, sah, it looks very kaploomious to me," while his customary invitation to friends of his own color was, "Let 's rejourn to the grocery and have a drink." It was Bill who once assured the Native that the doctors had told him that unless he quit working so hard he would become a confirmed "infidel." On another oc-

casion he appeared at the Native's house and said that he had been sent by one of the doctors to borrow his soup "syringe" for a dinner party. The last time the Native ever saw the old man his face was badly swollen and he confided that he had an "ulster" on his tooth which hurt "everly bad."

When we left the Native that night we begged him to join our party the next day. As usual, however, he explained that the morrow was probably one of the busiest days of his life. The garden had to be raked, he had promised to take some papers up to old Dr. Jones, there were letters to write, and there was scarcely a chance that he could be with us. As usual, on the stroke of seven, the hour which we had fixed for starting, the Native joined us on the porch of the old Villanova, which still keeps up the tradition of good food and low prices for which the Cape was once famous.

Leaving our hostelry, we circled the Point until we came to Moonstone Beach, as we had christened a lonely stretch of sand where, the winter before, we had discovered a drift of moonstones, or quartz crystals, to be exact. That day we had studied snowflakes, those strange light finches of the Far North, and had watched eagles, fish hawks, and turkey buzzards all in the air at the same time.

At the beach a power boat was to pick us up. Long rakish schooners, spanking clippers, swift silent sloops, brigs, barks, brigantines—all are good craft for adventuring. Give me, however, a staunch power boat with plenty of gas and a skipper who knows his engine

in all of its moods. It may not be so romantic, but one can chug along at an honest ten miles an hour and fear no calm, head winds, or lee shores.

While we waited we hunted moonstones. It is a fascinating game. Each wave rolls the pebbles up the beach and retreats among a rainbow of shimmering colors — Etruscan-red, Tyrian-rose, old silver, lune-green, water-blue, violet-black, honey-yellow, garnet, pansy-violet, and a score of other tints for which I can find no names. Among this riot of colors an expert will pick out unerringly the ice-white gleam of a wet moonstone. One has to snatch it up swiftly from the beach before the returning wave hides it forever under a mass of other colors. At first, too often, my moonstones turned out to be only bits of cloudy quartz. Little by little, however, my eyes became trained, and I would find moonstone after moonstone in the welter of wet colors which each wave spread out before me. Some tides were better than others. At some seasons of the year, or after great storms, untouched strata seemed to be uncovered. Of course most of the moonstones were either small or flawed. In a dozen or so there is usually at least one worth having cut for a scarf pin or cuff link. Then there is always the chance of finding some Kohinoor worth a king's ransom — at least, we hoped so. Walker buoyed up our hopes by telling of a lapidary who once spent a vacation at the Cape and in two weeks netted $840 from the stones which he picked up along the beaches.

At last the power boat appeared, manned, steered, captained, and owned by the Skipper. He landed,

regarded our treasure-trove disdainfully, and, as the next wave ran out, picked up a moonstone fully twice as large as any that had been found, and handed it to me nonchalantly. Only prompt and united action by the Ornithologist and the Botanist and the Collector kept me from abandoning the trip in favor of treasure hunting. I was finally hustled protestingly into the boat, the ignition switch turned on, and we departed toward the horizon beyond which lay desert islands, rare birds, and unknown nests.

After many chugging hours we came to where the water showed blue-gray against stretches of white-brown sand and green flats as we wound our way through a tangle of shoals and islands. Clouds of green-headed flies followed us — those pests of our Southern shores. They looked much like the common horsefly of New England, except that they had brilliant green heads and a far more bloodthirsty disposition. The Botanist, who is of a statistical turn of mind, has calculated that if the ordinary green-headed fly were as large as an eagle, it would kill a man every five minutes throughout the day — and I believe him.

Overhead were laughing gulls with their black heads, white tails, and gray black-tipped wings. They are much smaller and swifter than the great herring gulls. We saw one of them snatch up a piece of seaweed from the water, drop it, and swerve down and catch it before it reached the surface of the bay. Everywhere skimmed those swift sea swallows, the Wilson terns, known also as mackerel gulls and strikers, with forked white tails, pearl-gray wings, and black-crowned heads. On the

flats great blue herons towered up like ostriches against the horizon, and as we passed beyond the shallows we saw the first black skimmer of the day. To me it was an entirely new bird, and I had a throb of that indescribable pleasure which a bird lover feels when he adds a new bird to his life list. To me the skimmer will always seem a spectacular bird, with his great black wings, tail bordered with white, and strange orange-red beak, cut so that the lower mandible stretches far beyond the upper. It is this beak which gives the bird his name, and as we watched it skimming the surface of the water we plainly saw it scoop up a small fish.

Farther on we saw eight skimmers on a beach, who barked like dogs, "Ough, ough, ough, ough," while sometimes they yapped, "Erp, erp, erp."

Beyond the skimmers we met a black tern, already down from the North, and then, as we skirted a muddy shore, we saw a rare sight. Not fifteen feet away, squatting in a hollow in the bank, was an old-squaw drake. Now the old-squaw is a sea duck which by preference stays away from shore and can usually only be studied by powerful field glasses. This one, however, was so close that we could make out every feather. He was a study in whites and browns. His head, neck, upper breast, and part of his back were pure white, while his wings, tail, and lower breast were brown and he had the two long black tail feathers and dark spot in front of the eye which mark the drake. As we sat studying him at close range, the Botanist suddenly decided to unship his camera and photograph this sea duck on land. This was too much for the long-suffering

fowl, and he suddenly slid down into the water, dived deep, and came up a hundred yards away.

Three greater yellow-legs flew over our heads as we started on, and the Collector told us of a long trip to Newfoundland after the rare nest of that bird, which, it seems, he nearly found. A cloud of young herring gulls in brown plumage, and immature laughing gulls which showed no black on their heads, were the only other birds we saw until we finally reached the tiny harbor which is the only entrance to Desert Island. The place looked lonely enough with its desolate dunes, from which one could look clear across to Spain, and the deserted beach where the surf booms forever against the white sand.

At the time we landed, the island was inhabited by a band of wreckers. To be sure, they claimed to be the summer crew of a life-saving station, but we knew better, for their houses were shingled with new shingles which they had picked up after the wreck of a lumber bark; all that spring they had fed full on bananas from the wreck of a fruit schooner, and that very day they were collecting hospital supplies from the wreck of a hospital ship. Altogether the island boasted a population of eight souls, excluding ours, and eighteen trillion green-headed flies.

We circled the island and found its beaches strewn with wreckage of all kinds. It was the Ornithologist who discovered two door knobs, one white and one brown, which he carefully placed in a hollow in the sand and then shouted to the Collector that he had found an unknown nest with two eggs. That enthusiast

ploughed his way to him through the deep sand at a tremendous rate, and a few moments later the Ornithologist was fleeing for his life with said door knobs whizzing after him as he ran. In the meantime the Botanist had found a leaden bottle sealed and stoppered with the same metal, and debated with me whether it was safe to open it. I suspected that it contained an afrite and he feared hydrofluoric acid, so we finally left that mysterious bottle intact and went on through the blinding heat.

By the time we reached the far side of the island it did not seem possible that one could be so hot and still live. In front of us stretched a perfect beach of white sand against which the green surf broke invitingly. I had just started to undress when sundry sinister black fins appeared just beyond the surf and patrolled the beach back and forth.

"Go on in," urged the Collector encouragingly. "They're only blue sharks. I don't think they'll hurt you."

I reluctantly resumed my clothes and assured him that while what he thought might be interesting, the important thing to me was what the sharks thought. Later we all had a swim in the inlet where we had landed. The water was delightful, but it was impossible to stay in long on account of the green-headed flies. They settled on our heads in swarms, and I literally clawed handfuls of them out of my hair as I swam desperately back to the wharf.

The farther end of the island was cut in half by a narrow inlet on the other side of which, among low

dunes, we had glimpses of black skimmers and clouds of tern. Holding my watch in one hand high above my head, and my purse in the other, I started to wade across, encouraged by the rest of the party. The water nearly reached my shoulders, but I arrived on the other side with purse and watch still dry. Immediately all the rest of the party followed my example, except the Botanist, whose fastidious nature could not endure walking around in wet clothes even for the few minutes in which it took that blazing sun to dry them. Accordingly he divested himself of everything save his shirt, leaving the rest of his clothes in a neat pile on the sand. Thereafter, with his single garment flapping in the breeze, he accompanied us, full of humorous remarks about our damp and bedraggled condition. Our laugh, however, came last, for he had forgotten the tide which waits neither for man nor for his clothes. This fact was borne in upon us an hour later when the Collector suddenly broke into such uproarious laughter that he felt it necessary to lie down on the sand and kick his heels. The Ornithologist likewise became so convulsed that he could only feebly wave his arm toward the inlet. Following the direction of his hint, I saw the Botanist's two shoes primly set sail for the open sea, followed by the rest of his clothing in a billowing mass. The sight of his self-satisfied unconscious back made me as helpless as the rest of the party, and the clothes and the shoes were in the middle of the inlet before we found strength enough to call his attention to their adventurous voyage. Without even taking time to remove his dry shirt, he plunged in and rescued the rest of

his raiment just as it was sinking for the third time, and thereafter he most unreasonably blamed us for the visitation which had come upon him as a reward for scoffing at older and wiser men.

When the Botanist was at last clothed and more or less in his right mind, we began to explore this hidden and lonely beach. Overhead three or four skimmers barked at us, and a cloud of Wilson tern filled the air with their grating notes. On a little mound twenty feet from the water the Collector found the first tern's nest, containing two olive-colored eggs with black spots, the most common of the different colorations of these eggs. Thereafter the Botanist salved his wounded feelings by finding the first skimmer's nest, containing one egg about the size of a crow's, and boasted about it all the way back to the cabin.

That night the Collector selfishly and feloniously stole the best bed in the best room of an unoccupied house, which I had marked for my own by the recognized method of putting my bag on its sagging surface. As he had crawled in under the sheets and was ostentatiously sleeping when I came in, I decided to ignore the cowardly act, and the Native and I took up our quarters in a smaller, humbler room. His ill deed, however, brought its own punishment. The screen in the stolen room had a large hole through which the mosquitoes poured in clouds, and both the Collector and the Botanist, who had abetted him in his theft, passed a sleepless, slapping, scratching night.

Early the next morning, after the mosquitoes had retired and before the green flies were awake, we had

a life-saving dip in the inlet and visited a salt marsh where the laughing gulls had been nesting earlier in the season. On the way over we met a flock of dowitchers on a flat companioning with a flock of semipalmated sandpipers. They were about the size of a Wilson snipe and showed white rumps when they flew, and had a chirping note. Their most characteristic action, however, was in connection with their feeding. They would bury their long straight bills deep in the mud of the flat and then bear down with their bodies with a kind of pumping motion quite unlike that of any other bird except the woodcock.

In the salt marsh we counted over a hundred deserted nests of laughing gulls, most of them matted platforms of reeds. I found one nest with a young bird in it, and the Collector found another nest with two eggs. Overhead the gulls wheeled and whirled as thick as a cloud of mosquitoes, laughing weirdly as they flew. All night long, too, we had heard them laughing through our sleep.

Then we picked our way across another stretch of salt marsh full of holes ringed around with grass and filled with liquid mud of an immeasurable depth in which one might be engulfed as in a quicksand. Beyond these we came upon a stretch of beach filled to overflowing with the nests of common terns and black skimmers. One had to step carefully in order to avoid crushing the eggs of one or the other. The nests were in all stages of development. Some had fresh eggs, some were nests of newly hatched young, and others showed the young almost full-fledged. Some of the terns' nests were made

of seaweed, others were simply depressions in the sand. The first of the terns' nests fell to my lot and contained three soft, fuzzy, brown little terns with black spots and pink, black-tipped little beaks. They lay out in the blazing sun, and one ran away as I came near. Altogether we counted ninety-one terns' eggs. They seemed to be divided into four varieties of coloration — white, light green, yellow-brown, and olive. Some of the yellow-brown were so dark as to be almost black. The Collector took careful and scientific notes of all the nests. Fourteen of them had three eggs and two of them had four eggs. In order to add a variety to his notes I carefully prepared one nest with five eggs, which he conscientiously set down, but when he found another one which contained three terns' and two skimmers' eggs he suspected the worst, and refused to include it among his notes.

Some of the skimmers' eggs were blue-white, beautifully marked with sepia and lavender. Others had only big lavender blotches. All of the skimmers' nests were but hollows in the sand, five by four inches in size. Their eggs were slightly larger than those of the tern. One of the terns' nests was beautifully lined with white razor shells, and held three eggs.

Another interesting nest was that of a skimmer which contained three eggs, one of which hatched out in the hot sun as we watched. Little by little the young skimmer broke his way through the shell and came into the world covered with wet hair and peeping loudly as soon as he uncoiled his lanky form and opened his eyes. The color of the young skimmers was a soiled

white covered with dusky spots, with white underparts and a bill reddish toward the base and black toward the end, with a white spot at the tip. We counted thirty-three skimmers' eggs. The air was filled with circling birds and vibrated with their calls. Among them were quantities of black terns who chirped instead of making the grinding, chirring note of the common tern. Although they had long ago nested a thousand miles away, yet, in sympathy with the others, they showed all the signs of nesting birds and chirped and wheeled frantically in front of me, deceiving me into hunting for their nests until the Collector at last told me of the joke they were playing upon me.

On another beach we found specimens of the least tern, which chirped like robins and were pure white with yellow bills and about a third smaller than the Wilson tern. Beyond them we found another colony of common tern in which we counted sixty-two eggs. There I was suddenly attacked by one of the birds who flew again and again straight for my eyes and would undoubtedly have driven her beak into my face if I had not constantly threatened her with my hand just before she reached me. For nearly a hundred yards she kept up this performance, chirring viciously as she whirled and dashed at me again and again.

Beyond this last tern colony I came to a high sand dune and at its foot found a little hollow in the hot, drifted sand containing four eggs thickly peppered with gray-black spots. I called the Collector, the Botanist, and the Native, and they all decided that the unknown nest was that of a least tern. The eggs

looked to me like those of a piping plover which I had once found in Canada. That bird is the color of dry sand and has a faint, sweet, piping call and a ring around its neck which, unlike that of its cousin, the ring-necked plover, does not meet. The rest of the party laughed my suggestion to scorn, assuring me that the piping plover had not nested in that part of New Jersey since Audubon's day. However, I am happy to be able to state that by some remarkable accident, as the Collector said afterwards, I was right, and said eggs are now in the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, labeled, "Piping Plover, N. J." Since that time piping plover have been found a number of times nesting along the southern beaches of that state.

At long last our day came to an end, and we went back from our lonely island with its wreckers, green flies, and sharks, with a good July record of thirty-nine different kinds of birds identified and four different kinds of nests found.

V

FRIENDS OF THE BARRENS

In the heart of the Barrens is "Faraway," my cabin on the bank of a crooked, brown stream where a laurel bush full of white blossoms stands guard in the spring like a beautiful ghost. Around it are rows and regiments of pitch pine, post oaks, black gums, and liquid-amber trees with their star-shaped leaves, while below them all, in the summer, the scrub oaks make a sea of green which stretches for twenty-five miles to the coast.

Every week or so I escape there from the work and worry of life, for, as John Burroughs once wrote, we all need a little solitude at times to ensure deep and fast colors of the spirit. There are many who think that the Barrens, especially in winter, are a lonely and desolate region, nor suspect how many friends are waiting there to welcome visitors.

One of them I met not long ago on a June day in a tiny field surrounded on all four sides by the pine woods. As I crossed this clearing I heard a quail whistle not far away, and imitated him — very badly, so I thought. Again he whistled, much nearer, and again I answered him. Suddenly there was a rustle close behind me, and from out of the thick grass into the path came a little cock bobwhite, fighting mad. With his wings raised, his beak half open, his feathers all bristled up, and his bright eyes gleaming like fire,

he rushed out to demolish the rival who had dared to challenge him in his own field. He was so close to me that I could see his snowy throat, and the white line over his eye.

When he saw me he stopped with a comical look of dismay, dropped his wings, and buzzed away like a bullet, scaling down into the grass far ahead of me. I tried in vain to call him back by whistling "bobwhite" again and the "O bobwhite," the treble note which a quail sometimes gives, but there was no answer. Then I essayed the assembly call, that curious little double note which calls a scattered covey together again.

After I had given it a few times there was a rustle near me, and out from the grass was thrust a little brown, black-bordered head. Bob evidently now wished to make friends with the strange giant who spoke his language, albeit so brokenly. When I whistled the call again, very softly, he gave a little click in his throat and moved nearer to me. When I went on, he followed me, and whenever I would stop, from somewhere within a circle of ten feet would appear his brown head and bright eyes.

As I finally left the field and went on down the road, the last sound that I heard was Bob's assembly note, "Come here! come here!" and I like to think that he wanted me to stay and become better acquainted.

A friend of mine at Cape May once had a Plymouth Rock hen who stole a nest in a field close by his barn, and when at last he discovered it, he found that a quail had laid six eggs in the same nest. He took away the hen's eggs and she hatched out six little brown-striped

bobwhites. All of them died from overfeeding save one, and she grew up to be the pet of the household. At mealtimes she would come to the table like one of the family, and although she wandered through the fields like a wild quail, would always come back to the house when my friend whistled for her.

The next spring she took unto herself a wild mate and left the place. One day in late summer she appeared again at dinner time with a brood of ten little bobwhites, which she marched into the dining room and proudly showed off to the family.

It was another bird-loving friend of mine who was stranded once in London where he knew no one, and to pass the time visited the Zoölogical Gardens. There, in the bird house, among a variety of exotic birds he saw a little bobwhite hen. Going close to the wire netting, he whistled very softly the assembly call. Instantly the little quail, who had been standing droopily in the cage, answered the call and dashed up to him with wings outstretched. For a moment the two Americans stared into each other's faces, each one glad to find a friend in that great, lonely, crowded city.

It was on a spring morning in the Barrens that another friend came to visit me. I had gone to bed the night before in my cabin, while a great honey-colored moon shone like a beacon among the pitch pines and the air was full of the clicking, flickering notes of the cricket frogs. Now and then a group of wood frogs burst out in a honking chorus like a flock of marsh-bound wild geese, while faint and far away from distant bogs came the high-pitched notes of the hylas, like a

BOBWHITE

chime of jangled silver bells. Two whippoorwills, on opposite sides of the stream, sang so fast that they fairly stuttered, and I fell asleep to their wild, ringing notes.

The next day I awoke very early, for during the hour between dawn and sunrise the Barrens are at their loveliest, and one sees colors then which disappear as the sun comes up. That morning, framed in the window beside my bed was more beauty than I ever believed could be crowded into so small a space. Above a sea of mingled greens hung a mist through which the spires of the pines showed dark and mysterious, while the star leaves of the sweet gums, the aspens, the white birches, the black gums, and the post oaks, all blended together into a magic, many-colored carpet across which flowed the stream, a crooked ribbon of dark amber lost in a cloud of mist-white and spring-green.

Suddenly, as I looked, from out of the mist came a large bird which skimmed the tops of the scrub oaks and alighted in a dead tree close to my cabin. As the sun rose I recognized the stranger as a female ruffed grouse, a rare bird in my part of the Barrens.

Sometimes in the spring a ruffed grouse will fly desperately through the dark as if beset by some madness, and daylight will find it in the most unlikely places for so shy a bird—on a telephone wire over a crowded city street, on the top of a moving train, or even inside a house. Such a flight that grouse hen had just finished. There she sat in full view on the end of a limb not ten feet from the ground, and when I went out to look at her, instead of flying away, she bobbed

her head to me affably and made a little clucking noise.

All that day she stayed close to my cabin, always bowing and speaking whenever I came near. Sometime during the next night she moved on, but I have always felt that her little visit might have been the beginning of one of those pleasant friendships which ruffed grouse sometimes form with humans. There have been several reported instances where a grouse has come out of the woods and played for half an hour at a time with human visitors, pretending to peck their legs, circling around them, and even flying up on their shoulders, keeping up all the time that little clucking note which is the friendship call of their kind.

Another friendship which started at Faraway and lasted for some two years was with a catbird. It began one spring morning when I shook some crumbs out of my back door. Immediately there was a loud call from the bushes, and out into the open hopped a sleek catbird and began to eat the crumbs, fluttering his wings and chirping to me in a friendly way as he did so. Later in the day, when I was lunching on the front porch beside the stream, he flew in, alighted on the back of a chair, and hopped from there to the table, where again he picked up the crumbs which I tossed to him.

Our friendship lasted all through that summer and fall, and the next spring when I visited my cabin one May day I had no more than opened the back door when, with a loud chirp, the same catbird appeared. He would never take food from my fingers, yet would always alight on the table and evidently liked my company.

Years before, when spending the summer with a friend at Haverford, we had the same experience. On clear days we were accustomed to take our meals on the side porch shaded by grapevines, and day after day a catbird would join us, alighting on our table and eating crumbs without showing any alarm at our presence.

The third year, my Faraway catbird did not appear, and I usually find that from two to three years is about the term of a bird friendship.

Another shy bird who used to visit me at Faraway was a whippoorwill. On warm spring nights when the air was full of frog notes, the whippoorwills would sing all around my cabin. Not far from my porch a dead cedar tree was bent over in a half circle, and there, sitting always lengthwise on the curved trunk, a whippoorwill would sing to me night after night. Finally he would alight on the rail of my porch not six feet from where I was sitting and sing his ringing triads so close that I could distinguish the little click in his throat between each note, which can only be heard when the bird is close at hand.

It was perhaps that same bird who gave me a performance at high noon of a summer day among the scrub oaks not far from my cabin. The pine warblers were singing their rippling notes, like a glorified chipping sparrow's song, and the blue-winged warblers were trilling, " Swee-chee, swee-chee." Suddenly from the depths of a thicket a whippoorwill began to sing in the blazing sunlight and sang for fully five minutes, drowning out every other bird note within a radius of

fifty yards — one of the most uncanny, incredible performances I have ever heard.

My best friend of the Barrens first came to me one winter night. The full moon showed like a mass of frozen gold above the black-green pines, and the thin boards of the cabin snapped with the frost. I had laid the logs craftily in my great fireplace so that they might burn all night long and save me from having to leave my warm bed to put on more wood. Swamp maple, post oak, black gum, and split pitch pine, with a backlog of white oak, they reached to the throat of the great chimney. When the fire blazed high I drew my bed close to the hearth, wrapped a great buffalo robe about me, and prepared to sleep the night through in spite of the bitter cold which crept in like a fog through the thin walls and many windows of my cabin.

I was just dozing off, when suddenly from the woods outside I heard the cry of a cat. At first I thought that it was a wildcat, the bay lynx, which is far more common and widespread than most people suspect, but the wildcat is rarely, if ever, found in the Barrens. Then I decided that the night wanderer was a wood cat, one of those cats which have reverted to the wilderness and live as their ancestors once did.

Three or four times the beast circled the cabin, giving a lonely call, as if the glow of the firelight through the panes had brought back memories of the days when he had been warm and safe and tame instead of daring the cold and dark to be wild and free.

Finally I could stand that eerie wail no longer, and

slipped out of bed and opened the door and called to the homeless one outside. At the sound of my voice the cat gave a little crooning, friendly note, as if glad to hear a human voice once more, but would not come into the light. At last, shivering with cold, I went back to bed and heard nothing more of the wanderer that night.

All the rest of that winter and through the following spring, whenever I spent a night at Faraway, the cat would see the light and come to visit me. Usually I would not hear him until late at night. Always he would go around the cabin with the same banshee wail which I had heard at first, answer me when I called, and then go off.

By spring, however, he would appear almost as soon as I had opened the house, and call to me out of the bushes not ten feet away, but I could never get a glimpse of him.

Then came a night in July when for the first time I saw him. The afternoon had been hot and oppressive, with a strange, uneasy tension in the air, and I went to bed, but not to sleep. A hot wind that came in puffs stirred the trees, which tossed and sighed as if, like me, they could not sleep. Then the wind rose and blew louder and seemed to be saying, over and over again, something sinister and foreboding.

Suddenly, with no warning whatever, there was a flash of lightning which showed every last detail of the landscape outside set in living flame, followed by a crash of thunder that seemed to split the very sky asunder. Flash after flash followed, while the thunder

sounded like the drum fire of a great battle. With a roar the rain rushed down like a flood upon my cabin. I left my bed and closed the windows and, groping my way downstairs, lighted a candle and sat down to read, for I could not sleep, while for two long hours the thunder bellowed and the lightning seared its way across the sky.

At last the storm trailed away to the west and the rain stopped, while, best of all, the tormenting tension in the air was ironed out and I felt that once more I could sleep. As I looked out of the window, dawn was just showing in the east, and in the west a waning moon was sinking wearily to rest. Then I heard a familiar cry, and there in the path that I have cut through the scrub-oak thickets, stood my friend, a magnificent velvet-black cat with a white spot beneath his upraised chin. I called to him from the window and with his tail arching over his back he answered with a little, glad cry as if he had come to make sure that I was safe after the storm. For a moment we looked at each other, and then he disappeared in the bushes.

From that time on he has never come back, although many a night I have awakened thinking that I heard once more his little, crooning, friendly call.

Again it was a winter day in the Barrens, and the gray-green cedars by the stream showed like dark plumes against a blue, blue sky, while the pitch pines along the path were all luminous with the pale gold winter sunshine.

Overhead in the late afternoon light swung the moon, a half globe of alabaster, white as frost, while frozen

pools lay here and there among the marshes like platters of old silver.

Once I heard the "dee, dee, dee," of a Carolina chickadee, a smaller and gentler bird than his Northern brother, and again the caw of a passing crow came down from the cold sky. Except for these sounds, nothing broke the utter stillness of the Barrens.

At Lily Brook, whose brown surface in summer is all starred with waterlilies, I had to cross as usual upon the tippy log which bridges the stream. In the dimming light the moon deepened from frost to gold and was mirrored in a pool whose still water seemed stained a wonderful, translucent green. There it gleamed like a yellow pearl set in jade. Beyond the pool I came to a drift of many-colored pebbles where I always stop and hunt for moonstones. They are really quartz crystals, but when they are cut and polished they look enough like moonstones to justify the name. For ten minutes I sifted the loose stones through my fingers. Suddenly I saw bedded deep in the sand, like a plum in a pudding, a perfect monster of a moonstone, larger than an English walnut. Its bubbled surface, fused by forgotten fires, glowed like soft white flame in the fading light.

Slipping it into my pocket for a luck stone, I followed a half-hidden trail through the silent pines, my feet making no sound on the matted blood-brown needles. Suddenly, just ahead of me, a flock of large birds flew silently up from among the trees. It was impossible to see them distinctly in the fading light, but the last one of all could not resist giving a single

loud chirp as he flew, and I knew that they were robins, and that, in spite of snow and ice, Spring was on her way.

Beyond the pines I came to a road of white sand bordered with long ochre-colored grass which waved in the wind like a woman's hair and deepened first to amber and then to a tawny gold in the rays of the setting sun. On the other side of the road lay an abandoned cranberry bog. The cranberry leaves showed crimson-lake against masses of cinnamon-brown sweet fern and pewter-colored patches of ice. Fringing the bog were silver birches, slim and straight with wine-red twigs, and bayberries, all drake-green and tawny, mingled with the violet-bronze of the inkberries, those poor relations of the holly, and the carmine canes of the cassandra.

With the going down of the sun the dark began to spread like a slow stain across the marshes. The frost lay like silver on the umber leaves and tea-colored trunks of the post oaks as I hurried by the bog and through the woods beyond.

Then, suddenly, Lonely House loomed up before me, bleached like a bone by a century of suns and storms and abandoned by humans for a full fifty years. Crowned by a quaint capped chimney where swifts nested in the spring, its weather-beaten clapboards were drilled full of round holes by optimistic flickers, who evidently took the house for some great gray tree. The little clearing was gnawed at from three sides by the woods, which each year crept a little closer. Beside the house stood the bare bole of a dead apple tree so

vast that it must have been planted when the house itself was built. On the fourth side and in front of the low threshold lay a lonely marsh.

Long ago I had found the house on one of my walks and had always thought of it as "Lonely House," for it was farther away from humans and more solitary and deserted than any house that I had ever known.

To-night as the violet dark flooded the Barrens and blotted out the pines marching in sombre rows across the white sand, that waste land stretched away still as sleep, without another house for miles and miles.

It was hard to believe that back in the old days the Barrens were full of men and women and children who made the paths which still wind everywhere throughout the woods and among the bogs. That evening as I stood there and gazed out over the marsh, there suddenly sounded in the distance a ghostly call, "Hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo, hoo"; it came faint and far away, yet with an indescribable sense of menace thrilling through it.

A moment later a dark shadow, from whose depths two dreadful eyes flared like fire, drifted through the white moonlight and a great horned owl alighted on a limb of the apple tree close to me. The grim bird was nearly two feet high, and was black and gray and tawny with a white collar and an angle of black feathers on his forehead which gave his face a scowling look. A moment later he saw me and drifted away across the Barrens, a shadow of death for all the brown bunnies for whom he was searching that night.

The owl no longer hooted and the wind had gone

down with the sun as I stood there and tried to picture the forgotten family which had lived in Lonely House a hundred years ago. An hour later, by short cuts and hidden ways, I came back to Faraway, and after a long day of walking through the Barrens was soon fast asleep in front of the fire.

Sometime in the mid of the night I awoke with a start and lay staring at the bed of glowing coals which was all that was left of the fire. Then a dreadful thing happened. From overhead came the sound of a step. Once, twice, and three times it broke the silence, sharp and staccato, ending always with a curious little shuffle, the dragging footstep of an old, old man. The sound was like fire and ice against my spine, for I knew that it could be nothing human, for no one could have been hidden in the rooms above me. Moreover, although the steps passed along just over my head towards the staircase, yet not one of the boards of the floor creaked or strained as they must have done under the weight of a human.

Like Dr. Samuel Johnson, I don't believe in ghosts, but I 'm mortally afeared of 'em, and when the sound began to move down the stairs with a measured slowness, the muscles of my scalp stiffened and my hair rose.

Nearer and nearer came that strange step at midnight in my lonely house in the lonely Barrens. Suddenly I could stand the suspense no longer. Gripping the heavy poker which I had fashioned from a black-gum sapling, I stepped over in front of the closed door, which opened on the staircase. As I heaved up my

poker, there was a grating sound from the staircase as if the Unknown on the other side of the door was gritting its teeth. With a tremendous effort of will, expecting to see some shape of horror, or, worse still, to find nothing there at all, I suddenly threw open the door.

There, seated upon the last step of the stairs, blinking at the sudden light which streamed in upon him, sat a red squirrel, all gray and tawny, with his fluffy tail arched over his back and in his trim paws a huge black walnut that he had dragged with difficulty down the stairs.

For a moment he sat motionless, and then with a startled look about him dived into a hole in the wall, abandoning the nut which he had been gnawing.

The next morning as I was sitting on the porch of the cabin I heard a rustle at the top of one of the cedar posts, and out from under the eaves appeared the same red squirrel whom I had met at midnight.

Perhaps he recognized me as the robber who had carried off his walnut, for he gave a funny little querulous, chattering note. I tried to answer him and found that by drawing my breath sharply through my closed teeth I could almost exactly imitate the sound.

As I did so he raced down the post, across the porch, and the next moment was sitting on my shoulder. Evidently as I could talk his language he took me for another squirrel, or perhaps a nut, as one of my friends unkindly suggested.

Only for a moment did he sit there, and then raced back to the house. I left him some of my breakfast, and

every time I came to the cabin during the next year I would give his little hissing, chattering call and always in a minute or so he would race down the post, and finally became so tame that he would take food from my fingers.

Then came a day when he did not answer my call — and I never saw him again. That is the trouble with our friendships with our lesser brethren — such a little, little time and they are gone.

VI

LOST ISLAND

"Come down. Lost Island found," wired my friend from the edge of Okefinokee Swamp — that unexplored Seminole stronghold which covers six hundred square miles between Georgia and Florida and which I had visited for the first time two years before. There are scores of islands, named and unnamed, hidden in the depths of that great marsh, such as Floyd's Island, where General Floyd fought a battle with the Indians in the thirties; John's Negro Island, discovered by a runaway slave; Bugaboo Island, where no man will stay alone after dark; Billy's Island, the home of Billy Bowlegs, the Seminole chief; and many others.

Of them all, however, Lost Island has always been the most interesting to me. Years ago it was supposed to have been discovered by a trapper, but after his death the way to it was lost. Twice I had searched for it. Once I had reached Lost Lake, which few people indeed have ever seen, but I could not find the hidden trail that was said to lead from there to the island. On my second attempt I lost myself in a labyrinth of morasses and only found my way out with the greatest difficulty.

As was to be expected, all kinds of legends had grown up about Lost Island. Some said that it was infested by a gang of moonshiners and that anyone

visiting it would never come back. Others held that it was all an invention of the dead trapper's imagination and that there never had been any such place. Then there were those who claimed to have met men who had visited Lost Island and who told me about the pileated and ivory-billed woodpeckers which nested there, and of the enormous live oak which grew within its limits. There, too, they said, could be found the limpkin, that link between the herons and the rails, and the wood ibis, our only American stork.

Two days after the telegram I stood at the entrance to the Swamp. Bud was waiting for me—a young giant with bleached yellow hair, blue eyes, and an unlimited fund of courage and endurance. It was he who had found Lost Island the winter before and who was to guide me there.

I climbed into a tiny flat-bottomed boat and stacked my duffel around me. Then Bud told Peggy that she could come with us. Peggy was a Cairn terrier with the brightest, blackest eyes that any dog ever owned. When she found that she was to go, she raced, she ran, she rolled, she jumped, she pretended to bite stolid old Jake, the English setter, and knocked over Rip, his puppy. Then she took charge of the boat and, appropriating the most comfortable seat, barked goodbye to the other two and told them at length just what they were missing.

Although no bigger than a minute, Peggy was not afraid of anything or anybody. She was the only dog I have ever known that would kill a diamond-back rattlesnake in a fair fight. Her tactics in such a battle

CAIRN TERRIER

were exactly those of a mongoose against a cobra. She would circle around the coiled rattler and, by making quick darts and feints, trick the snake into striking again and again. Each time the diamond-back would come back into coil more and more slowly until at last there came a moment when its huge body would lie exhausted at full length. That was the instant for which Peggy had been waiting, and she would dart in like a flash, sink her sharp teeth into the snake's spine just behind its head, and never let go until it was dead. During midsummer she was not allowed in the Swamp at all, for the sly black alligators which lurk there during warm weather are fatally fond of little dogs.

As we started that afternoon, the dark water showed all sepia and silver with gleams of emerald and midnight-violet in its depths, and now and then a strip of pure turquoise where the canal mirrored the open sky. Here and there water lilies, left over from the summer, floated like lumps of ivory on the wine-brown surface and along the banks the high foxtails made rows of silver candles, with yellow asters showing in their midst like scattered gold coins. Back from the water's edge the colors of the trees were blended in a long strip of Eastern carpet which included the purple and dull crimson of the gum trees, the orange-tawny of the cypresses, and the emerald green of the pines.

All about us were the birds of the South. A dazzling white egret watched us from the top of a tall cypress all silvered with Spanish moss. Little brown-headed nuthatches fed, head downwards, in the trees and kept up a continuous little clinking note. Constantly we

heard the harsh cry of the "jam-jacks," as Bud had named the red-bellied woodpeckers. Now and then we met flocks of brilliant wood ducks and flights of the ring-necked ducks, whose drakes have chestnut-brown rings around their necks and white circles about their bills. A kingfisher flew ahead of us downstream, and occasionally we saw little gray ground doves with a faint rosy glow on their heads and necks.

Once we met a loggerhead shrike — a trim, well-dressed killer who wore a black-and-white uniform with a black mask and had glittering black eyes and a hooked beak. Like the other shrikes, the loggerhead fastens his victims, little birds and large insects, to thorns and always bathes after his kill before he eats. Then there were the Louisiana herons with blue necks and white underparts, and the Southern towhee, which in the Swamp is named "jo-ree," and has white eyes instead of red ones like his Northern brother.

Once, among all these interesting strangers, we heard the "far-away, far-away" of a bluebird — those lovely contralto notes which fall from the sky like drops of molten silver. Looking up, we saw that dear, brave bird of the North flying toward the sunset with the sky color on his back and the color of the red clay of the South on his breast, and we watched him until he was lost in a mother-of-pearl cloud.

As the stream stretched away ahead of us through fairy vistas, Bud pointed out to me a deep mark in the sand on the bank, which looked like the print of a bare human foot, except that it was wider and the heel mark came to a point. "That 's a bear track," he said.

" Yesterday as I come aroun' this bend, I near ran into an ol' he-one startin' to cross. When he see me, he took out an' run through the bresh to the next clear place — but I got there as soon as he did. Then he run ahead again an' I paddled, an' again we both got to the next crossin' together. That time he stood an' looked at me plumb disgusted like, an' then turned aroun' an' went back."

By mid-afternoon we had reached the fish hawk's nest which marked the spot where we left the canal. From that point Bud followed hidden waterways and twisted channels toward Floyd's Island, where I was to meet Dan and John. For miles and miles he drove the boat along with his three-pronged push-pole, following secret marks and ranges hidden from my eyes. All about us were the " prairies," as he called the open stretches of marsh so covered with water lilies, golden club, pitcher plants, and other water weed as to resemble green and flowering meadows. Everywhere they were dotted with " houses," the Swamp name for islets, ranging from a few feet to half an acre in extent, where bear, deer, and others of the wild folk made their homes.

At last the air grew sharp and there spread out before us the unearthly beauty of a winter sunset in the Swamp. The western sky was a sea of pearl, stippled with flame and turquoise and apple-green. As the light dimmed, the pines showed black against a band of blood-red and the moss hung from the cypresses in festoons of burning rose. Then across the blazing sky a Ward's heron flapped heavily, blue-black against the

flame, and through a bank of lavender cloud the evening star flared like a lamp hung out in the west.

In the afterglow we came to a clump of cypresses towering above the thick underbrush. With a deft turn of his wrist Bud swung the boat around the moss-covered trunks into a hidden channel masked by the trees and stretching away through the bushes like a tunnel. Following this, we came at last to a path made of boards nailed across stumps and fallen tree trunks, which ran for nearly a mile above the morass and brought us at last to Floyd's Island, where my friend had a cabin hidden between two vast live oak trees.

As we reached the island, the full moon looked down upon us from the top of a long-leaf pine like some living, glorious creature from another world. Far away, like the roar of distant surf, we heard the sound of the wind sweeping across miles and miles of open marsh, yet not a breath reached the island to break the cold, moonlit stillness or to stir the sleeping trees.

We followed a little trail through the dwarf palmettos, which the frost had made safe from lurking diamond-backs, and soon came to the tiny shack of Uncle Billy, the caretaker of the island, a little gnome of a man with a bristling white moustache, who is one of my best friends. He had his cook-fire blazing beneath a tree and around it were grouped the guides. The leaping flames among the dark shadows of the overhanging boughs brought into relief the faces of the hunters and made a scene which harked back to the days of Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, and all that long line of our pioneer forbears.

We stopped for a moment's greeting and then went on to the cabin where Dan, my host — a mighty hunter before the Lord and a true sportsman — and John — the manager of one of his turpentine companies — were waiting to receive us. John was another small man, with gray-blue eyes which looked out unflinchingly from behind horn spectacles, and was one of the best-liked men in the Okefinokee. He was also the most noted shot in the Swamp and could break bottles in the air with a rifle, or put a bullet into any specified part of an up-thrown hat, as many of his friends had learned to their cost. Moreover, he proved himself to be an accomplished cook by the dinner which he served for us that night. It began with snapper soup made from a turtle which he had dug out from under a tussock where it had been hibernating. Then came a broiled three-pound, large-mouthed black bass which Uncle Billy had caught that morning, followed by roast mallards and ring-necked ducks, all topped off with a magnificent plum pudding and a pot of hot coffee.

After the dishes were washed, we sat before a great fire of lightwood cut from the pitchy heart of pine stumps and had a long evening of such good talk as one finds only among good friends around an open fire in the wilderness.

On the floor in front of the fireplace lay the tawny pelt of a panther which measured seven feet from nose to tail-tip. This great cat, which is almost extinct throughout the Northern states, is still to be found in the swamps of Georgia and Florida and is the same animal variously known as the painter, cougar, puma,

and mountain lion. That particular one had been tracked down by dogs after it had killed a number of young cattle and several hogs, and John assured me that its mate was undoubtedly still lurking somewhere in the Swamp. Then he told us of the curious habit which a panther has of following the trail of a human, and of its bloodcurdling cry. "A scream like a woman having her throat cut," was the way he described it.

"One night I was out with Rid Chesser and we heard a painter screech quite near us," he went on. "Rid climbed a tree, though he had a machete and I had a gun."

Before daylight the next morning, Bud tapped at my window and I crept out of my warm bed into the icy dark, slipped on my clothes, and joined him in the kitchen, where he had an unlimited supply of coffee and bacon and eggs waiting for me. Then, leaving our friends still abed, we began the quest for Lost Island.

The moon was still high in a midnight-violet sky as we pushed our tiny boat through a little channel which zigzagged among the cypresses on the north side of Floyd's. Then it was as if a film had passed across the flaming gold and a band of silver showed in the east, which slowly brightened to amber and then to gold, while the dusky water of the marsh was transmuted into a pale emerald and then to beryl-green overlaid with rose — colors which no lie-abeds ever see. When at last it had become the frosted silver shadowed with violet which is the usual color of the open water of the Swamp, the whole eastern sky was a sea of burning rose and incandescent scarlet, through which a rim of

flame-gold suddenly showed — and another day had begun.

Hour after hour Bud poled me expertly across wide prairies and past innumerable islets. Sometimes we would seem lost in stretches of tall yellow grass, shoulder high; yet, following the same hidden waterways which the Indians had once known, he always brought the boat out again into open water. The Swamp was covered with a film of ice, like black watered silk, which broke before our bow with a tinkling sound, while from far away came the rippling trumpet calls of the sand-hill cranes as they flew above the tawny cypresses and the crimson water oaks.

After hours of travel through a labyrinth of channels, islets, and bogs, large and small, we came to a deep, narrow stream which led between huge cypresses and widened into a chain of dark pools, linked by stretches of blue water, like a necklace of black opal and sapphire. Then it widened into a river bordered with cinnamon-brown hurrah bushes, casina trees with evergreen leaves and brilliant red berries, and rows and regiments of cypresses festooned with amethyst-gray moss.

There Bud pointed out to me a pool where the year before he had taken Dan's daughter a-fishing. On her first cast she caught a four-pound bass. On the second she hooked the largest black bass that Bud had ever seen. While she played it with the short steel rod, which all fishermen use in the Swamp, her reel came off. Dropping her pole, the girl gripped the line and began to pull in the great fish hand over hand. At that

moment, attracted by the splashing which the fighting fish was making, an alligator darted out from under the bank and tried to seize it.

"I clipped him over the nose with my push-pole an' kind o' discouraged him, but he kept comin' back," related Bud. "At last she got the fish close enough so she could slip one hand into his gills an' yank him into the boat, while I kept off the 'gator with my pole."

Then Bud began to laugh.

"I never will forget Mr. Dan's face that night when we got back," he went on. "He asked her did she catch anything. 'A couple of little ones,' she says. Then I brung 'em in. One weighed four pounds an' t' other fourteen, an' Mr. Dan he nigh fell over backwards. She was sure the fishingest girl I ever see," he finished.

Beyond this famous pool the river widened into a tiny crescent-shaped lake, indescribably beautiful as it stretched away before us bordered with the bleached silver of the cypress trunks. As we entered it, a pair of wood ducks rose before us, the crested, rainbow-colored head of the drake gleaming in the sun.

Paddling expertly through a school of snags and water-logged tree trunks, Bud brought the boat behind a clump of gallberry bushes — that holly with bitter, black berries and evergreen leaves which we call the inkberry in the North. Pushing aside the overhanging boughs, he showed me a hidden waterway zigzagging through a tangle of trees and brush and just the width of the boat. Overhead the boughs were so dense that the light which filtered through them was of a dusky green and the way became a tunnel instead of a channel.

For perhaps a mile we followed this little canal until it came to an end and we stepped out of the boat to wade the rest of the way to Lost Island, following a line of blazes which Bud had made the year before. He went first with a machete and cut a way through the close-set bushes interlaced with vines.

Once a bear path crossed our way, a narrow trail filled with the same marks of wide, bare feet which we had seen on the bank of the canal the day before. At another place we came to an otter slide, a pile of sticks and leaves heaped together on a log, down which the otter would coast two or three feet into the water below — a poor substitute for the high banks of his Northern brother.

Finally, after five hours of climbing and wading, we reached the island and I dropped exhausted on a bit of the first dry ground I had seen since early that morning. When at last I could walk again, Bud guided me through the long grass and reeds to the ruins of a little shack which he had built during the winter he had spent on the island. Then we visited the "bay," the Swamp word for a grove of hardwood trees, where Bud had once seen an ivory-billed woodpecker — "a big ol' bird with white jaws that chops holes in trees." A little later Bud showed me the huge live oak of which I had heard, a towering, gigantic tree bent by the weight of half a thousand years, yet it looked as if it would stand as long as the earth endured.

Suddenly, as I stared unbelievingly at its vast girth, from its far side came the sound of heavy blows, as if some woodcutter were at work there. Walking around

the trunk, we saw on a dead stub a magnificent bird. Its upper parts were black and the whole top of its head scarlet, the feathers lengthening to form a solid, vivid crest. Its wings were black and white and it seemed nearly as large as a crow. As I watched it hewing out slabs of decayed wood with its sharp, horn-colored bill, I recognized it as the pileated woodpecker —next to the ivory-billed, the largest of our woodpeckers.

For a long time we watched him. Although the pileated woodpecker is one of the wildest and shyest of birds in the North, that one on Lost Island paid us no attention whatever. After each heavy blow of his chiseling beak, he would stop and cock his head as if listening for some answer to his knocking. Finally, convinced that there were no grubs in that dead limb, he raised his head and gave his call, " Wick-wick-wick-err " — a cry much like that of the flicker, only louder and wilder and with a curious drop at the end. Later on we saw a red-bellied and a Southern hairy woodpecker come to the same tree, but there was neither sight nor sound of the lost ivory-billed woodpecker nor any time to explore the island further if we were to get back to our boat before nightfall.

The return trip will always stand out in my memory. I tried to forget my fatigue by recalling other difficult trails in different parts of the world, but could remember no worse going anywhere. We waded and cut our way knee-deep through miles of thickets laced with the accursed bamboo vine, which twined around our legs like barbed wire. Once we lost our way and

had to go back an interminable distance, and all the time we were racing with the dark; for if we were not out by nightfall, we should have to stay in the icy water of that black swamp until morning. Bud began to regard me anxiously, wondering, as he told me afterwards, how far he could carry me if I gave out.

Finally, just before the last light faded, we reached the channel which would lead us out into the open marsh. Dragging myself stiffly into the boat, I crouched down in the bow and hoped against hope that Bud would be able to find his way through the mazes of the marsh after dark. At any rate, whether he could or not, a dry boat would be an improvement over a wet swamp as a sleeping place. Like a slow stain the dark spread over the lake and the shadows of the great cypresses were inked against the dull silver of the water. Then the pale gold moon blossomed in the dim violet sky and slowly rose above the edge of the Swamp, followed by a flaming star.

All around us were the mystery and the magic of the shrouded, silent trees, and as our boat slipped through the shadows it seemed almost as if we had entered another world. Bud followed the clues of the twisting waterways for hours and hours on end, as unerringly under the moon as under the sun. As the night wore on, the moon rode high and keen above us and all the cold in the open sky seemed to concentrate upon our little boat until my teeth chattered in my head. Then at last the great trees on Floyd's Island loomed up before us and through the twisted channel we caught the sudden warm glow of firelight.

Half an hour later I was seated before a roaring fire of blazing pine knots, while John set before me a brace of roasted ring-necked ducks, a pan of fried sweet potatoes, a pot of smoking coffee, and a stack of flapjacks covered with honey and butter and cinnamon. I may forget my name or my age (I wish I could) or my home, but never to the very last hour of my life shall I forget that dinner and the twelve hours of sleep which came after.

Soon, all too soon, came the day when I must leave the Swamp, with its treasure of adventure and beauty and friendships, and go back to the workaday world whence I had come. My last morning on the island dawned warm and balmy and I was up before sunrise for a farewell walk through the woods. Near Uncle Billy's shanty, in the top of a high tree, I suddenly heard the song of a pinewoods sparrow which, though wintering on the island, evidently thought summer had come again — the same wonderful song I had heard there the spring before.

The fox sparrow of the Far North has a song whose notes are as rich and beautiful as gold. The minor cadences of the white-throated sparrow, the silver flute-notes of the field sparrow, which sings in the twilight, and the dreamy melody of the vesper sparrow are all beautiful; but the pinewoods sparrow has a mystery in his song which is not of earth. As I listened, I saw Uncle Billy in the distance and beckoned him to join me. When at last the bird stopped singing and flew away, the old man drew a deep breath.

"Do you know," he said, "when I hear that bird sing, I believe I 'm goin' to live forever."

"Why, of course you are, Uncle Billy," I assured him. "We all are."

"Well," he replied slowly, "I know that the preachers say so, an' I used to think so too — when I was young. Now that I 'm gettin' old an' tired, I ain't so sure. But when I hear that bird sing — I know it, I *know* it."

VII

THE RATTLESNAKE DEN

We tame folk who sleep soft and safe at night, nor ever know what real fear is, cannot visualize the dangers which lurked about the lives of our pioneer ancestors.

Up at Cornwall, where my people come from, in the northwestern corner of Connecticut, which was settled as late as 1738, the women used to stand on guard against Indians with loaded muskets, while their men did the ploughing. Fearsome stories of panthers and wolves have filtered down through the scant two hundred years which separate that generation from this one. Moreover, the town records of Cornwall contain the following entry:—

> December 17, 1745: That two shillings be given for each rattlesnake taille that shall be killed within the bounds of this town by any of the inhabitants of it who shall bring said tailles to the Selectmen.

Tradition has it that over on Rattlesnake Mountain, one of the twenty-seven named hills of Cornwall, an enterprising citizen killed fifty rattlers in one day and nearly bankrupted the township.

The howl of the wolf, the war whoop, and the panther's scream have been silent in Connecticut for a hundred years and more. Yet the rattlesnake, more dangerous than any of the American carnivora, still remains.

These snakes have a curious habit of assembling from far and near at the beginning of cold weather and hibernating together, usually in some rocky ledge or mountain side. About these dens they can be found in large numbers in the fall just before frost and again for a week or so in the spring.

One such den on Kent Mountain in Connecticut I visited some years ago with Jim Pan, the last of the Pequots, who, with his son, Tin Pan, lived on the tiny Indian reservation which Connecticut still maintains. There old Jim taught me how to pin down a coiled rattler with a crotched stick, grip him behind the head with the other hand, and drop him hissing and writhing into a bag, which Tin Pan had thoughtfully provided.

After that initial trip, I have always advised my sporting friends who shoot big game for excitement to take up rattlesnake hunting. Instead of spending thousands of dollars in organizing a safari to kill defenseless animals with high-powered rifles, they can get just as much of a thrill with a crotched stick and a bag, make themselves popular with various zoölogical gardens, and help rid the country of a very real menace. In a single one of our states in one year thirty-eight people died from the bites of venomous serpents, most of them rattlesnakes, of which there are thirteen varieties in this country. The death rate from rattlesnake bites ranges from probably 10 per cent in our Northern states to as high as 35 per cent in the South and Southwest.

However, I regret to say that none of my friends thought well of my suggestion. Indeed, most of them

regard any interest in snakes as a deplorable and degenerate trait.

On three other occasions I have visited the Kent Mountain den, securing specimens each time, the last one being a jet-black rattlesnake, the only melanic example of that snake which I have ever seen. Again I visited another den in the fall at Black Rock in Massachusetts, with a famous Author. We saw only one snake, which escaped, much to his relief. All of these New England dens are a long distance from any of the larger cities, in wild and inaccessible places. A few years ago, however, I discovered one a little over an hour from Philadelphia in the pine barrens, where I have a little cabin in the woods to which I run away whenever possible.

For years I had heard stories of rattlesnakes in that region. They were said to be found at Sheep Pen Hill, a deserted village some five miles from my place, and at Governor's Hole, near the little forest village of Chatsworth. Again, at Upper Mill, my friend Charlie Rogers, who lives there alone in a log cabin, once showed me a singed cat which he claimed had saved his life. The old proverb holds that singed cats are better than they look. That one certainly could not have looked worse. During the winter she had slept so close to Charlie's stove that her fur had been singed off her back in great patches, giving her a peculiar, leprous appearance. Nevertheless, Charlie told me that one morning when he started to go out of his door, she ran ahead of him and began dabbing with her paw at something on the step. Looking down, he saw a coiled

rattlesnake on which he would undoubtedly have trodden if it had not been for the cat's warning.

Charlie also told me of a neighbor who once saw, in the spring, a rattlesnake in a hole in a swampy place near Upper Mill, which, by the way, is not a mill at all, but only a dam on which a mill stood a hundred and fifty years ago. During the winter this man went to the place with a spade and dug out no less than fourteen rattlesnakes which were hibernating there.

All of the old inhabitants of the Barrens near me, however, seemed to agree that the one spot where rattlesnakes were most abundant was at Mount Misery, a tiny settlement some six miles from my cabin.

One May a great Editor spent a week-end with me at my cabin, demanding all the adventure possible as a relaxation from the strain of rejecting manuscripts for months at a time.

I first took him canoeing. As he had never been in a canoe before, and the stream on which my cabin stands is probably the crookedest body of water in the known world, our trip could quite properly be chronicled as an adventure. Then I suggested that we motor over to Mount Misery and explore the rattlesnake den which was said to be located there. My friend remarked that he would try anything once —even a rattlesnake den. Accordingly, picking up some bankers who were week-ending at a neighboring cabin, we started for Mount Misery. After traversing a maze of sandy roads through dense woods, we came at last, unexpectedly, upon a deep-bosomed old house with dormer windows, set in a hollow. All around it

were clouds of pink and white apple blossoms, the deep coral of swamp maples, and the sombre green of cedar trees.

The old house, built in 1737 and surrounded by little tenant houses, was the home of Mrs. Pitman, a fine old lady who had lived there for sixty years, and since her husband's death had carried on the farm, the cranberry bogs, timber lands, and clay banks included in her domain. The place had been settled over two hundred years ago, by woodcutters who had suffered so from mosquitoes that they christened their home Mount Misery, the name which it has borne ever since.

Mrs. Pitman received us kindly and directed us to the den, a bowl of swampy land about an acre in extent, bounded by a bank some thirty feet high, which was the celebrated "Mount" and which was only about three hundred yards from her house.

"They say there 's plenty of rattlers there," she said in answer to our inquiry. "As for me, I 'm not interested in 'em. Help yourself to all you want," she ended generously.

Then she went on to tell us how the year before she nearly stepped on a rattlesnake in coil in her door-yard. Although eighty years old and the mother of eleven children, she claimed to have covered ten feet in a standing broad jump, a very creditable performance for a woman of her age.

Mrs. Pitman had a cat which made a specialty of catching and eating pine swifts, those little lizards with brilliant blue patches on their sides which run up and down pine trees in the Barrens.

THE RATTLESNAKE DEN

The story of the swifts reminded me of a day when some Boy Scouts once visited my cabin. Their leader was a young man much interested in natural history and eager to improve his mind. By some miracle I caught a pine swift and handed it to him for a closer examination. The swift escaped from his fingers and whisked up his sleeve and raced around his body. The touch of the lizard's scaly body against his skin drove the young man almost frantic, and he tore off his coat and shirt as if they were on fire and never stopped undressing until the swift escaped into a near-by thicket.

After I had finished my swift story, we formed a procession. Having met rattlesnakes before, I was placed in the van, flanked by the three bankers, while the Editor, with that good judgment which had made him so successful, brought up the extreme rear.

Quite appropriately, as we entered the confines of the Den we encountered no less than three poison-sumac bushes, which have arsenic-green leaves and greenish-white berries instead of the red fruit of the harmless staghorn and mountain sumacs. The surface of the marshy bowl was covered with withered ferns and dry bracken through which the fiddle heads of new ferns and the evergreen leaves of the sheep laurel showed.

As I picked my way very carefully through the dry cover, suddenly a hiss sounded just ahead of me which made me bound backward like a startled gazelle, under the impression that I was about to step on a rattlesnake. The warning turned out to be from a pine snake, an umber and cream-colored serpent which grows to

a length of some seven feet and, although entirely harmless, has a most devastating hiss. That one slithered off into the brush before we could collect him.

Beyond this point we separated to search thoroughly the acre which made up the Den. For some time nothing occurred. Then one of the bankers who had come to a tree trunk remarked conservatively, "I think I see a rattlesnake."

"Don't touch him," I called back. "Wait until I get there with the bag."

"I won't. I give you my word I won't," he replied earnestly.

As I approached him, he murmured somewhat doubtfully, "I think I see another one."

When I reached him he was standing beside the fallen tree, and in front of him was coiled the largest timber rattlesnake which it had ever been my fortune to encounter, while another smaller one was slowly entering a hole near the side of the trunk. The larger one was at once pinned down with a forked stick, and with some difficulty the smaller one was hauled out of the hole by the tail, with a net loss of nine rattles. As I was about to put the larger one into the bag, holding it firmly by the neck just behind its heart-shaped head, its mouth gaped wide, and from a ridge of white gum in the upper jaw the movable hollow fangs appeared, crooked, keen, and glistening white, about half an inch long. Halfway from their needlelike points was an opening like that in a hypodermic needle, through which oozed pale yellow venom, the very essence of death. Once the great snake jerked its head

sharply and threw the venom several feet through the air, a drop of it landing on the wrist of one of the bankers. He rubbed it off with a handkerchief, which he then threw away, and washed his hands some thirty-seven different times in a near-by pool, according to the Editor's report afterwards. The venom of a rattlesnake is, of course, entirely harmless unless introduced into the blood stream or the eyes.

I tried to persuade the Editor to hold the larger snake for me while I was occupied with the other one, but he indicated that his life was too valuable to the literate public to be lightly risked.

As a matter of fact there is no danger in handling even the largest timber rattlesnake if it be gripped close to the head and the body held in the other hand so that its weight may not break the grip on the neck. As for gripping a diamond-back rattlesnake, which may be nine feet long and enormously heavy and powerful — that 's another story.

The forked tongue of the great serpent was black, the iris of the eye red-brown, and the oval pupil black rimmed with gold. Between the eye and the nostril showed the curious hole or "pit" which has given the rattlesnake, copperhead, and moccasin the name of "pit vipers." Its nature has never been determined, but it probably has some connection with the sensory organization of the snake, perhaps some sixth sense. The pit and the oval pupil are the hall marks of a venomous snake in this country. The pupils of the eyes of a harmless snake are always round. I explained to the Editor that if he would pick a snake up and look it

carefully in the eye he could always make certain whether the specimen was dangerous or not. I do not care to set down here his answer to this suggestion. The rattlesnakes, copperhead, moccasin, and coral snake are the only venomous snakes to be found in Eastern America. In the Southwest there are two other snakes, the jew's-harp snake and the annulated snake, which are also dangerous.

I am free to say that the eyes of an enraged rattlesnake do not have a pleasant expression at close range. There is an expression of sheer menace in them which no other creature possesses — "peepholes into hell" was the Editor's description of the same.

We finally succeeded in depositing both snakes in the bag and decided to call it a day, and afterwards presented them to the Philadelphia Zoölogical Gardens. The first one was the largest timber rattlesnake ever received by that institution, and a few days after her arrival presented the zoo with eleven little rattlesnakes.

The day after our return to civilization the Editor called me up. "I 'm so stiff from canoeing that I can hardly stand up, and I could n't sleep last night thinking of those damn snakes," he said. "I had a bully time, though, and I hope you'll ask me again soon," he finished forgivingly.

Two weeks later, on a clear hot day, I again visited the Den with a well-known naturalist and two other friends — "innocent bystanders," as they described themselves. We hunted through the swamp for some time without success, and again it was one of the amateurs who discovered two rattlesnakes. When I

reached him one was in coil, the other was halfway into a hole and my friend was holding it down by the tail with a forked stick, while it rattled away like an alarm clock. Several times the snake thrust its head out and I tried to pin it down, but without success. Finally I gripped it by the tail, while my friend kept his stick over the hole to keep the head from coming out again, and with some difficulty I managed to pull the infuriated reptile out and catch its head in the fork of my stick before it could strike. After that there was little trouble in bagging both of them.

Although bulky, they were not especially large specimens. One was three feet and the other three feet, six inches long. The bigger of the two had irregular blotches, the color of burnt-umber and raw-sienna, while the smaller snake was of a dark golden-brown shade, much resembling the color of the common red-bellied water snake, and did not rattle at all. In the North, so far as my experience goes, the rattlesnake dens are always in dry places, but the Southern specimens seem to prefer swamps, and in the Okefinokee, between Georgia and Florida, the timber rattlesnake is known as the water rattler, as distinguished from the diamond-back rattlesnake, which rarely, if ever, takes to the water.

On our way back from the Den that day we found a box turtle on whose back some unknown lover had cut two sets of initials inscribed in a heart, along with a date over fifty years back. The turtle seemed to show no signs of its responsibilities or advanced age.

After leaving the Den we had a long talk with an old man who lived in a little house not far from the

Mount. He complained bitterly that quite recently he had come into his home and lifting up a newspaper from his table had found a big rattlesnake coiled up underneath it. He ran out to get a stick, only to see the rattler disappearing down a hole in the floor as he returned.

"If many more of them blame snakes keep comin' into my house I'm goin' to move," he threatened.

He had seen a dog die within twenty minutes after being bitten by a rattlesnake. Another dog which was bitten plunged into a pool and stayed there for three days and nights, finally recovering as a result of that hydropathic treatment.

The old man had just caught and cleaned a ten-pound snapping turtle containing seventeen eggs, and said that he had taken them up to twenty-eight pounds and about the size of a small washtub. He further told us that pine snakes brought fifty cents apiece and that some nineteen hundred a year were shipped out from that part of the Barrens for use in circuses and for snake-charming acts. One dealer at Chatsworth had bought over twenty-nine thousand pine snakes during the past twenty years.

I remember many years ago passing along the lower part of Market Street in Philadelphia one evening and seeing a comely young woman standing in front of a little museum, wreathed around with pine snakes. I stopped and asked her what kind of snakes they were.

"They're Indian cobras. Don't get too near 'em. They're mighty dangerous," she warned me.

"Not to me," I boasted, pulling a big one from

around her neck where it lay like a scarf, whereupon she greeted me as a member of the profession and insisted that I come inside without charge and meet her husband and see their collection of snakes. I remember that they had a fine reticulated python, which I helped put to bed in its sleeping bag, and a big diamond-back rattlesnake, from which her husband had removed the fangs, not knowing that they always grow again in a short time.

On our way home from the Den we visited a white-cedar swamp and found there, growing out of the sphagnum moss from clumps of five green leaves, much resembling those of the lily of the valley, on long, naked stems, the famous Helonias or swamp pink. The head of the flower was a large cone of six flesh-colored petals with rose-pink ends and, although not beautiful, is one of the rarer finds among the flora of that locality, being as typical a flower of the Barrens as is the turkey beard and the pyxie moss.

My next trip to Mount Misery was in the fall, when two of my boys and I visited the Den. We saw no snakes and were about to leave the place when one of my sons told me excitedly that there was a rattlesnake close to where I was standing. I looked where he pointed, but could see nothing that looked like a snake. Not until he almost touched it with his stick could I make out the great coiled serpent, so closely did its coloring blend with the dry leaves and withered fern on which it lay, and I realized as never before the danger of walking through a snake country without watching one's step most carefully.

That snake was so curiously light in color that I chloroformed it, and its skin now adorns my cabin wall.

It was on May 6, 1922, that I went again to the Den. I had been sick with an attack of influenza and finally, after weary days and dreadful nights, had gone to my cabin to recuperate. While I was convalescing there, two of my friends and their wives drove over to see me and insisted that I guide them to the Den. It was a beautiful afternoon when we started under a sky the color of a robin's egg and filled with flocks of fleecy clouds. Once again we prowled through that swampy bowl which, for some unknown reason, is in such demand as a rattlesnake residence. As usual, at first we found nothing, and my friends indicated that the stories that they had heard about Mount Misery were not founded on fact. Then just as we were about to leave I stepped over a clump of withered fern and suddenly noticed a movement among the dry fronds, and saw right between my feet the cruel, flat head of a monster snake. The timber rattlesnake will not usually strike unless touched or alarmed by some sudden movement, so I removed my foot slowly from close range and then did a standing broad jump which rivaled Mrs. Pitman's performance, and from a safe distance watched foot after foot of the mottled body move out of the hollow beneath the fern until its whole length was in the open, the largest banded rattlesnake which I have ever seen. I called the rest of the party over to prove that the Den was still inhabited. As they came up the great snake threw himself into an irregular coil, while his fifteen rattles buzzed fiercely and his

head drew back menacingly, ready to strike. The stroke of a rattlesnake is perhaps the swiftest thing in nature, too swift to be followed by the eye or avoided by the hand, but it can strike less than half its length from coil.

After we had admired for a moment that embodiment of sudden death, I pinned the great head down with a forked stick. Instantly with a whirl and a rush the monster flung its coils here and there and thrashed through the dead bracken like a mad thing, hissing and rattling, while the air was full of its sickly, musky smell. The stick held fast, however, and dropping to my knees I gripped the snake's neck just behind the head, while I grasped the scaled body with my other hand to prevent its surging length from tearing the head loose from my grip.

Finally, after a long struggle, we got the snake into a bag and brought him back safely to my cabin. To-day his skin, which measures exactly six feet, three inches, and has fifteen rattles and a button, is on my cabin wall opposite the light skin of the one I caught in the fall. That last rattler had a gray and black coloration such as I have never seen on any other rattlesnake save in the Barrens.

It was in May 1927 that I visited the Den for the last time. The night before, I had come to the Cabin through the soft dark, sweet with the scent of cassandra, disturbing, as I came along the path by the stream, one of the gray deer of the Barrens, bedded in a patch of soft yellow grass.

The ground was carpeted with Hudsonia showing a

cloudy gold in the dusk. Once from the far, pale-lavender sky fell a chorus of sweet wild notes as a company of yellow-legs passed overhead. Across the marshes sounded the high pipings of the pine-barren hylas and the drawling mutter of the Barrens' leopard frog, who wears a beautiful, fawn-colored coat dotted with black spots ringed with dark green. The fairy lanterns of the first fireflies were swinging among the sepia shadows, and drowned stars gleamed back at them from the black satin stream.

I was awakened at dawn by the reveille which a gifted flicker was giving on the eaves-trough just outside my window. No human drummer could have beaten the long roll half so quickly, and no human being could sleep for one minute after it began. Leaning far out of the window, I could see the talented performer with his gold-lined wings and the bright scarlet band across the back of his neck, drumming so rapidly that his head made a blur against the red-brown metal.

As I leaned farther out he caught sight of me, and with a loud chuckle bounded off through the air, his white rump gleaming in his up-and-down flight. The mist was rising in slow coils from the dusky amber water, and a swamp maple with its brilliant keys made a rose-red cloud against the deep green of the pines. Below me a blue-winged warbler drawled "swee-chee" among the scrub oaks, and I caught a glimpse of his golden head with the black line through the eye. An ovenbird across the stream said loudly and rudely, "You cheat, you cheat, you cheat."

Then from the top of a post oak near the cabin a

brown thrasher began his beautiful florid performance. So pleased is he with his singing that he always doubles each phrase, which is all that distinguishes his song from that of the catbird. When the thrasher saw me watching him admiringly he flew over to a pine tree only a few yards from my window and repeated his song with many self-conscious switchings of his long tawny tail. So close was he to me that I could see the wedge-shaped black marks on his breast rise and fall and his beak open splittingly wide as he sang, and catch the gleam of his yellow eyes as he gave me a side-long glance now and then to see how I liked the performance.

A few moments later and I dived into the stream and swam through the amber water until, ten feet down, I felt in the darkness the cold, smooth pebbles at the bottom of the pool. Then I turned and came up and up through the golden depths until I shot out into the sunlight and the fresh spring air again.

I had promised myself only a night in the Barrens, but when I stopped at the store for supplies I learned from the genial Frank Ross, who runs the best country store for miles around, that Asa Pitman, the week before, had dug out a score or so of rattlesnakes at Mount Misery. Suddenly I resolved to walk to the Den and find out what had happened there. Why be too hard a taskmaster of oneself on such a May day as might never dawn for one again? Wherefore the train that was to bear me back to the city met me going in the opposite direction. As it left me headed away from my office, I quieted my conscience with the quota-

tion which always stands me in good stead when I decide to run away from work:—

> Time is for dogs and slaves,
> Man has Eternity.

Ahead of me stretched the Barrens spangled with flowers. There was Hudsonia or Barrens' heather with its faint aromatic scent and myriad five-petaled flowers of the purest, lightest gold, new ones opening every day, so that for miles the white sand was carpeted with pure gold. Here and there a whole deserted road would be drifted deep with the feathery, sky-white, rose-centred blossoms of the sand myrtle with its evergreen leaves. There were sunshine patches of wild mustard set in emerald-green grass and sandy stretches empurpled with the delicate blossoms of the blue toadflax.

Once I came to long stretches of purple-pink with here and there pools of pansy-blue where the ground pink and the bird's-foot violet were growing together. Everywhere that spring day were flower fields of such beauty that it was difficult to determine which was the loveliest. There was one group, however, which always comes to my mind whenever I remember that walk to the Den.

I was following one of the hundreds of wood paths which one finds everywhere in my part of the Barrens, reminders of the days when those lonely waste lands were well populated with iron and glass workers. Suddenly I came upon a little group of seven gray birches, trees usually of small growth and short life. These were the largest that I have ever seen. Beyond

them was a sea of lupines. Above the flat wheels of their oval leaves were masses of butterfly blossoms, indigo, dark purple, violet, lilac, and light blue shading to white; the whole bed was a shimmering mass of turquoise and sapphire, lapis lazuli and amethyst.

Beyond the lupines a mourning dove with whistling wings suddenly flew out of the crotch of a low pitch pine. From below there seemed nothing there but a casual handful of pine needles, altogether too flimsy to be a nest for so large a bird as a dove. Nevertheless I climbed the tree and found concealed by the width of the limbs a deep nest lined with dead bracken and holding two eggs that showed like pink pearls against the gray fern on which they lay.

At length I resumed my journey, nor stopped until I reached the home of Asa Pitman, who lives about a quarter of a mile from the Den.

Asa is a pleasant-spoken, intelligent man with a nice wife and children, and we at once began a snake symposium apropos of the Den and the other snakes to be found in that part of the Barrens. He showed me first, in a box outside of his house, a snake which he had caught under the platform of the near-by railway station. It was forty-four inches long with smooth scales of a yellowish-brown color blotched with red squares bordered with black. Its eyes were red with black pupils and its white tail was marked with black. I thought that it might be the corn snake, a beautiful Southern snake which has been found as far north as Delaware, but which I think has never been reported

in New Jersey. That night when I came home I called Dr. Witmer Stone, the best naturalist in Philadelphia, from a dinner to examine the snake, only to find that it was the Southern form of the milk snake, a fact which I ought to have known, and it now reposes in the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences.

As we talked snakes that day Mrs. Pitman chimed in, and told me of seeing one day a monster king snake, that black snake with cream-colored markings which is immune to the poison of the rattlesnake and copperhead. She said that the one she saw stretched clear across a wood road and must have been fully ten feet long. Allowing for the shrinkage which a snake in the hand always shows over a snake in the bush, she undoubtedly had seen one of the big snakes which once in a lifetime are encountered in the Barrens. I have seen a king snake in captivity over eight feet long. Although she knew that the snake was harmless, she dared not approach it for its very size's sake.

Then Asa told me a fearsome story of a deserted house in the Barrens which is haunted by a rattlesnake. Frequently its track was seen in the sand, always leading directly to the cellarway of the old place. A rattlesnake always makes a furrow in the sand as straight as if drawn with a ruler, while the track of any other snake is wavy. Months later I investigated this story and myself saw the telltale trail leading to an opening into the cellar wall of that old house.

Taking my courage — and a box of matches — in my hands, I went through that cellar, but could not find the occupant, who probably sleeps there in some

crevice in the wall during the day and comes out at night to hunt the small mammals on which rattlesnakes feed.

Then Asa showed me a cannon ball which he had found at Mary Ann Forge, now only a clearing in the woods, one of those which had been cast for the Revolution, and also a fifty-pound boiler weight which he could hold out at arm's length. Then he told me that a sister of his went out berrying the year before and disturbed a rattlesnake. When it rattled it was immediately answered by two others, and she found to her horror that she was standing in a circle bounded by the three snakes. Afraid to move, she screamed for help until one of her mother's hired men came out and shot all three. Asa also told me of stepping on the head of a rattlesnake which was so large and powerful that it raised his foot from the ground in its efforts to free itself. I did not press him for further anecdotes, feeling that anything after that would be an anticlimax.

The week before he had found a rattlesnake while working in his garden and made up his mind to try and thin out the rattlesnake population in the near-by Den. Seeing one disappear into a hole there, he procured a shovel and dug out no less than seventeen rattlesnakes in one place and fourteen in another, making thirty-one in all, large and small, which he sold for a substantial sum to an agent for a zoo. One of the smaller snakes he killed while digging out the hole, and the next morning, going back to the place, he found a dead crow lying beside it. The bird had evidently alighted to feed on the dead snake and been struck by

another larger one coiled near by. Over in another part of the Den he showed me a dead deer which he thought had also been killed by a rattlesnake.

We resumed mining operations at the Den, but the lode was evidently exhausted, for although we dug in several places there were no signs of any more rattlesnakes. At one hole, however, we uncovered a long, beautifully cut, flint arrowhead, a rare find in the Barrens, as most of the arrow points found there are rudely made from bog iron ore.

I have carried that one ever since as a mascot. Perhaps it belonged to some old-time chief who dared the hidden death which still lurks in the Den and hunted there centuries before any white man had ever visited the place.

VIII

OKEFINOKEE

It was my third visit to the Okefinokee, that wildest stretch of virgin territory still left in Eastern America.

"Watch yo' step in the Swamp," said Rod, after telling me how he nearly stepped on a coiled diamond-back rattler as he came out of his cabin the week before my arrival.

"How about moccasins?" I queried.

"There's a plenty, all yo' want," returned Rod, briefly. "Only yesterday I was out shootin' dove 'long the edge o' the Swamp, an' jus' as I was takin' a step I hear a little hiss an' there was a cotton-mouth coiled right at my foot, his ol' white mouth wide open. Golly me, what a jump I took. I must ha' been in the air 'bout two minutes."

"Well, what happened?" I inquired weakly, as he stopped speaking and began to light his pipe.

"Nuthin'," he replied between puffs. "I blowed his head off when I come down an' went on 'bout my business."

"How big was he?" I questioned.

"Oh, he war n't so big," returned Rod. "'Bout five feet long an 'thick aroun' as my arm."

On the floor in front of Rod's great fireplace lay a tawny skin, seven feet in length from its round head to the tip of its long tail, which I recognized as the pelt of a panther and which Rod told me had been killed that month on one of the islands in the great marsh.

"Likely yo' may hear his mate befo' yo' come out," he said. "She 'll scream like a woman bein' murdered."

Rod, a mighty hunter, with a great beak of a nose, deep-set eyes, and a chalky face, had promised to guide me to Floyd's Island in the depths of the Swamp, where I was to stay with Uncle Billy, who lived there all alone.

In the ice-blue sky the moon showed in the afternoon light like a bowl of alabaster, fretted and carved in shadowy patterns. In front of me stretched a fourteen-mile canal. The wine-brown water reflected the deep green of the long-leaf pines on either side of the stream, with now and then gleams of dragon's blood and carmine-lake as the leaves of the black and sweet gums stained by the frost reflected their colors in the water. Everywhere were towering cypresses silvered with festoons of Spanish moss. Above the setting sun the western sky was a sea of amber and dim gold with shoals of violet and heliotrope clouds in its depths.

I climbed into the little flat-bottomed boat and seated myself in the bow with my duffel all around me. Rod started the portable motor, and a moment later we had rounded a bend in the stream and were in another world, where everything was strange and new and beautiful.

As we shot through the smooth water, I saw a pair of blue-gray gnatcatchers, bluish gray all over, with long tails bordered with white, and heard their call notes from the tops of the high trees, like the sudden twang of a banjo string.

Farther on I saw the typical bird of the Okefinokee,

the American egret, that white heron with black legs and a yellow bill, which is connected with many of my most beautiful memories of the Swamp.

Once I saw one perched in a slash pine outlined in silver against the pale gold of the moon at dawn. Another day we came to a blue pool in the middle of the Swamp ringed around with six egrets, while again at the end of a winter day I saw a flock of them flying black against the sky only to turn, one by one, a gleaming silver as they crossed the face of the full moon.

December in the Swamp corresponds to October in Northern latitudes, and the leaves of the different trees had just been stained by the first frosts. There were the red oaks, so-called, which have leaves like a Spanish oak and a bark like a chestnut oak, and water oaks, whose bark is like that of a maple, with blackjack leaves, all amber and dull crimson. Everywhere showed the deep wine-purple of the sweet gums, the orange-tawny of the cypresses, and the wine-red of the black gums.

The long-leaved pines were abundant, their needles showing a violet-green against the sky. Another tree that was new to me was the cassine, a tree something like the holly, with evergreen leaves and brilliant red berries, and there were hurrah bushes, with long festoons of nut-brown seed pods, and gall-berries, a species of holly, which in the North I had known as the ink-berry, and everywhere the ubiquitous bamboo vine like green barbed wire with its sharp, curved thorns.

Deeper and deeper into the great marsh we traveled,

following the course of the canal. At one point Rod showed me a strange print in the sand like that made by a broad, bare, human foot, except that the heel came to a point, and he told me that the day before at that spot he had met a black bear about to cross the canal. According to him, there were two varieties of bear found in the Swamp, the black bear, which grows to a huge size and usually has a white blaze on breast or throat, and the hog bear, which is smaller, with a yellowish wash on its fur, probably the same subspecies as the Louisiana canebrake bear, which is sometimes straw-colored.

Beyond the bear tracks we came to the end of the canal, and Rod shipped the motor and took the three-pronged push pole peculiar to the Swamp. Using this expertly, he threaded the boat through waterways and hidden channels and past innumerable islets, following ranges and secret landmarks which were hidden from my eyes.

As we traveled deeper into the Swamp the landscape grew stranger to me, and I began to glimpse more and more of the wild folk never seen by me before.

Once it was a wide V of glistening birds with crooked, yellow bills and black patches on the underside of their wings flying overhead, my first sight of the white ibis.

Just after we passed the slide, I saw a horned owl feeding upon a marsh rabbit, that curious aquatic species which can swim like a muskrat. In the North that fierce bird hunts almost entirely by night, although once in the Barrens I saw one catch a cotton-

GREAT HORNED OWL NO. 2

tail rabbit in the middle of the afternoon, but in the Swamp they seem to hunt as much by day as by dark. The Florida barred owls were the more common owl, and we heard their ghostly bayings every night and often in the daytime, one of the weirdest sounds of all that lonely land.

At last in the flaming gold of a winter sunset we reached the hidden channel, concealed behind a group of great cypresses, which led to Floyd's Island, along which Rod poled the boat among great trees and through dark thickets until we reached a tiny wharf. There we left the boat and for a mile followed a narrow path above the marsh, made of boards nailed to stumps and fallen tree trunks, until we landed high and dry on the island, where a century ago the Seminoles had their principal village. There Rod turned me over to my old friend Uncle Billy.

The next morning the weather suddenly became as warm as summer, and Rod went back, promising to return for me at the end of the week. Then followed long days of fishing, bird study, and botanizing, with much gossiping around a light-wood fire with Uncle Billy in the evenings.

One morning I decided to explore Floyd's Island itself. It was only four miles long, and there was a trail which ran from one end of it to the other. I put a book and some lunch in the big pockets of my shooting jacket, hung my field glasses about my neck, and was off for one of those lazy, happy days when one sits as much as one walks. Now and then I would stop and study the birds, or admire a strange plant, or spend

an hour or so reading in some inviting spot. Once, as I sat with my back against a live-oak tree watching a pileated woodpecker with a red crest hew slabs of wood out of a dead stub, I heard a strange sound from a near-by thicket such as a cat might make. Then from under a dwarf palmetto not ten feet away came a rustle that sounded ominous to me, for snakes were abroad that day and already I had seen a small king snake coiled up beside the trail, his black markings showing vividly against the white sand.

The rustling among the stiff leaves came nearer and nearer, and I expected any moment to see a grim head with lidless, unwinking eyes thrust itself through the green fans. Suddenly, instead of a rattlesnake, a gray squirrel came out into the open, smaller and slimmer than the Northern variety. With funny little hops he moved towards me and ran up the trunk against which I was leaning, and stopped not two feet from my face. Then, raising his head, he gave the same plaintive cat-call which I had heard over in the thicket, and I realized why the smaller squirrel of the Swamp was called the cat squirrel, as distinguished from his big brother, the black-faced fox squirrel.

That one looked so comical as he mewed, beating time with his bushy tail, while his bulging brown eyes stared vacantly around, that unconsciously I smiled. As the muscles of my face moved, he darted down the tree and back to his hiding place.

A little later as I was walking gingerly across a sandy stretch of palmetto scrub I felt a sudden, sharp pang in the calf of my leg. Fearing the worst, I thrust

aside the palmetto leaves with my stick, disclosing, not a diamond-back, but a prickly pear, the only cactus of our Southern and Eastern states. Several of its stiff rapierlike thorns, as long as my forefinger, were sticking in my stocking. Much relieved, I pulled them out carefully and then sampled the glutinous, rose-colored fruit which grew on the flat, pulpy leaves. They tasted like a combination of pomegranate and tomato, and were filled with hard, round seeds.

The sun had set before I reached the Indian mound which I had planned to visit and which rose about ten feet above the surface of the island. Great trees were growing out of its sides, and I left the trail and sat on its summit in the early dusk and tried to imagine what manner of people they were who had heaped it up, for the Seminoles found it there when they came centuries ago.

Then, as I sat there, from the far end of the island which I had just left came a sound which made me forget everything else. It began as a high, wailing cry, indescribably wild, dropped to a lower pitch with a gurgling note of agony and menace running through it, rose again to a mad screech, and died away in a rasping, snarling note of stark menace.

I have heard a fox scream of a fall night, one of the most awful of all wild-animal sounds. The ghastly shriek of an injured horse, the screech which a great horned owl sometimes gives, and the caterwauling of the bay lynx are all startling and sometimes terrible sounds, but none of them could compare with that vampire scream of the panther which I heard that

evening in the dusk in the middle of the Okefinokee Swamp. A moment later and the sound came again, louder and fiercer than before, and I realized that the beast had crossed my trail and was coming toward me.

Although a panther very rarely attacks a human, it has been known to do so, and I was armed only with a pair of field glasses. Moreover, a puma, like a bay lynx, has an uncanny habit of following a man's trail. Altogether something told me that it was time to get back to Uncle Billy's cabin and his big fire. A second later I was proceeding down the trail at a brisk rate —I shall always maintain that it was not a run, but "brisk" was certainly the word. I did not hear the scream again nor the crashing of a heavy body through the brush behind me, although I expected both sounds any minute, and it was with a sense of great relief that I saw at last the firelight show through the windows of the cabin.

When I told Uncle Billy what had happened, he looked at me reproachfully.

"Don't you never sit on no Injun mound after dark again," he warned me. "Like as not what you heered war a hant 'stead of a painter."

The night after my trip to the Indian mound was as warm as a night in June, and Uncle Billy let the fire go out and we both sat outside on a little bench in front of the cabin. The sky was a dusky violet all aflame with stars, and a dull orange moon showed just above the cypress trees. Suddenly there came from the marsh a booming bellow, so tremendous that the very island seemed to shake.

"An ol' bull gator," said Uncle Billy. "He thinks it 's spring."

Then he told me of Still River along whose banks no dog may walk, of the night when fifty-eight gators were killed on Grand Prairie, and of the boy who was dragged down by one while swimming. One of his alligator stories was of the day at Buzzard's Roost Lake in the depths of the Swamp when the alligators drove all the fish out of the lake and through a little run into a small pond. A hunter who happened to be going by was led to the place by the cries and calls of the ibis, herons, and egrets which were feeding upon the fish. Before the alligators became alarmed he shot fourteen of them, and the survivors moved back into the lake in a solid mass.

"You could ha' walked fifty yards on their backs without touchin' the ground once," finished Uncle Billy.

"Did you ever have a gator attack you, Uncle Billy?" I inquired.

"Twicet," he told me, "an' them was plenty. The fust time was out beside Blackjack. He come up sudden an' bit a piece right out o' the gunnel o' my boat. I poked him with my paddle, an' he bit the whole blade off an' went under. Well, suh, I don't aim to let no gator come prankin' aroun' me like that, so I slipped a couple o' buckshot shells into my gun, an' when he come up again I let him have both barrels an' he stopped livin' right there. He was eleven feet long an' a bob-tail."

"What about the other time?" I persisted.

"It was one night just off Honey Island," he said. "A big gator come right into my boat. As he come in, I got out, for I figgered he wanted the boat worse 'n I did. I was only 'bout ten feet from the island an' I kep' right on goin' till I struck dry land. I 'd hung on to my gun, an' soon as I landed I turned aroun' an' put some buckshot spang through his head. He pitched out dead an' sent the boat right over to where I was standin'. So I got a gator an' a boat at one shot."

As Uncle Billy stopped speaking, a mocking bird began to sing from the top of a slash pine, low and dreamily at first, as if singing in his sleep. Then, as the full moon rose higher and higher, until all the trees were set in silver, his song became louder until the whole Swamp rang with the wild sweetness of it as if the moonlight itself changed into music. For a long time we sat and listened.

"It was on a night like this that Tom Tiger came back," said Uncle Billy suddenly. "I was sittin' where we are now, an' all of a sudden there he was right in front o' me. I near fell off the bench, for I took him for a hant, but when he asked me for a chew o' terbaccer, I knew he were human."

"Who was he?" I inquired.

"Tom was one o' them Seminoles what was druv outer the Swamp an' down inter the Everglades by ol' General Floyd," responded the old man. "He 'd come all the way back to see the place where he was born."

"But, Uncle Billy," I objected, "the man would have to be over a hundred years old if he ever lived on this island."

"That 's what he claimed," returned my friend. "He said he was a hundred an' twelve years old, an' he sure looked it with his wrinkled face an' long white hair. Tom claimed that down in the Everglades there are fourteen squaws all of 'em over a hundred years old. He stayed aroun' here quite a piece lookin' at the mounds an' showin' me the places where his people used to camp. There war n't no doubt that he knew a lot about this island. Then one night he disappeared just as quiet as he come, an' no one ain't ever seen him since."

The next day we cruised around the Swamp in the boat. Here and there were wide pools, some of them large enough to be called ponds. Those were "gator holes," where the alligators lived. In some of them, deserted by their former owners, I had wonderful fishing, casting gayly colored plugs from a short steel rod such as all fishermen use in the Swamp. Hardly would the bright baits land at the far side of the pool when they would be seized by large-mouth bass, which Uncle Billy called "trout." Now and then we caught "jack," the Swamp name for pike, and the channels and canals swarmed with warmouth perch, yellow perch, and blackfish, a dark, carplike fish which grew to a large size. One, which we came upon stranded in the shallows, must have been fully three feet long.

On the way back, as I was sitting in the bow, my gun across my knees, I suddenly saw an ominous brown shape coiled high up in the branches of a gall-berry bush beneath which we were about to pass, the largest moccasin that I had ever seen.

In another second the boat would touch the bush

and the snake would probably drop on my head. Taking quick aim, I fired, and the moccasin, nearly cut in two, fell into the marsh close beside the astonished Uncle Billy, who received it with a yell. For a moment the open, white-lined mouth with its two fangs dripping with yellow venom showed above the water and then sank out of sight.

Uncle Billy sighed deeply.

"I can't never tell what yo're goin' to do next," he said at last.

On the way back the talk naturally ran to snakes, which in and around the Okefinokee are a part of every-day life. Only the week before my arrival the manager of a turpentine company operating on the border of the Swamp stooped down to pick up a wood dove which he had shot in a field near his cabin, heard a rattle, and sprang back just as the head of a diamond-back rattler struck the spot where he had been standing a second before. He shot the snake, and the headless body measured over six feet in length and had eleven rattles.

Another man stepped directly upon a coiled diamond-back and leaped enthusiastically into the air. During the fraction of a second before he reached the ground the great snake struck him twice, the first time on his canvas legging, while the second stroke pierced his leg above the knee. The fact that the snake expended a large part of its venom in the first stroke probably saved the man's life, for he recovered, although his leg swelled enormously.

Then Uncle Billy told me of a little girl who was

bitten by a garter snake and died within twenty-four hours.

"No garter snake is poisonous, Uncle Billy," I protested.

"Well, all I know is that she was bit an' died — an' there 've been others," returned the old man stubbornly.

When I questioned him further I found that the "garter snake" was ringed around with red and yellow and black, and recognized from his description the coral snake, a dangerous snake with fixed hollow fangs, belonging to the same subfamily as the cobra. The coral snake imitates closely two harmless snakes, the scarlet snake and the scarlet milk snake. The colors of all three are scarlet, yellow, and black, but the coral snake has black bands bordered with yellow while the other two have yellow bands bordered with black, a slight color variation which means, however, all the difference between life and death.

The next day Rod appeared to carry me back to the work and worry from which I had escaped.

"Come back soon," said Uncle Billy at the wharf, his white hair blowing in the wind. "You 're liable to get hurt among all them engines an' autocars an' flyin' machines up North. Down here it 's safe."

IX

THE GNATCATCHER'S NEST

The call came one May afternoon. All day long even the city sky had been spring-blue. Once, inked black against a fleecy cloud, a wavering line of wild geese passed high above the seethe and turmoil of the city. Then, from my office window, thirteen stories above the roaring street, I saw in a tiny courtyard a mass of creamy magnolia blossoms which overnight had starred themselves against a brick wall.

A little later, drifting in through the open window, came a butterfly with tawny, fluted wings, on the underside of which was stamped in silver a Greek interrogation mark, which is our semicolon.

The birds were coming back, the flowers were coming up, and honey-sweet May was questioning why I stayed imprisoned by brick and stone and iron, far away from the sweet wild folk who messaged me by the turquoise sky, the soft air, and all the sights and scents and sounds of spring.

Then the telephone rang, and faint and far away came the voice of the Naturalist.

"We pass through Philadelphia to-night on a bird trip to Virginia and have saved a berth for you."

Midnight found me boarding a south-bound sleeper. In the smoking room I found the Naturalist and the Banker, two of the sextette with whom I have traveled

afield for so many years. They were on their way to a lonely little village to study the nesting habits of certain of the Southern birds, and, like myself, had no business to go, for the one was deserting his bank and the other his practice.

"All signs fail in spring weather and no rules hold in May," observed the Naturalist, epigrammatically, when I tried to reprove him for running away from his business.

For an hour we sat there and talked over past adventures among sphagnum bogs and lonely mountains. Then it seemed to me that I had hardly fallen asleep when I was rudely pulled out of my berth and, half dressed, with my open bag in my hand, deposited at five o'clock in the morning on the platform of a tiny Virginia station. As I finished my dressing, there was no human being in sight, and only three houses, but I insisted upon starting on a still-hunt for breakfast, knowing from past experience that both the Banker and the Naturalist were perfectly capable of going all day without thinking of food if only they could see and hear enough new birds or find a series of interesting nests. Through the windows of the largest house we could see a loaf of bread and a jug of syrup on the table in the dining room. We knocked on the door, at first timidly and then loud and louder, but no one came. We tried the door. It was unlocked. We looked at each other, and the next moment three formerly respectable citizens fell upon that defenseless loaf and jug like the burglars that they were.

As the last crumb disappeared, there was a step on

the stairs and a little, smooth-faced man with bright blue eyes, wearing an immaculate white shirt, but no collar, entered the room.

"Are you the gentlemen," he queried, "who 've been making such a hell of a noise in my house at five o'clock of a Sunday morning?"

The Banker, who was nearest, wiped his sticky mouth and began one of those eloquent discourses with which he is accustomed to reduce boards of directors to a state of helpless assent. The Colonel — for such, of course, was the title of our host — stopped him halfway.

"You are welcome, suh, to anything in my house if only you 'll be quiet about it," he said in his soft Southern voice. "My wife 'll be down in a minute and get you a better breakfast than bread and syrup. She may be a little late," he went on, apologetically. "You see, we have eleven head of children and it takes some time to get 'em all up an' dressed."

A few minutes later we met Mrs. Colonel and some of the older of the eleven, and sat down to a breakfast of hot spoon-bread, fried chicken, and unlimited strawberries and cream, such as could have only been served in the South.

The Colonel insisted upon our coming back and spending the night at his house as his guests, and we afterwards found out that he owned seven farms and was one of the best-known citizens of that county.

Half an hour later, as we moved off down the village street, full-fed and content, we marveled at Southern hospitality and tried to picture what would have hap-

pened to three roughly dressed travelers in the North who had been caught breaking into a man's house and stealing his food at five o'clock in the morning.

Soon after leaving the Colonel's home we reached the woods, composed mostly of slim, long-leaved pines with here and there that strange tree, the Hercules-club, whose stout trunk was covered with sharp spines and whose compound leaves were fully three feet long. The flat, sandy ground was carpeted with bird's-foot violets of a soft brilliant blue, with now and then a pink lady-slipper glowing like a rosy lamp against the brown pine needles.

As we walked along, the Naturalist rapped with his stick on a pine stub, and out of a little hole some eight feet from the ground flitted a brown-headed nuthatch, a dear, silent, drab little bird, who cocked her brown head on one side like a sparrow. It was my first sight of that Southern species. Her nest inside the hole was lined with spider webs and pine-seed lobes, and contained six ivory-white eggs peppered with specks of cinnamon-brown.

Beyond the nuthatch's home, in a tangle of green-thorn, I found the nest of a cardinal grosbeak containing three eggs all heavily marked with blotches of chocolate and lavender. A pair of blue-gray gnatcatchers squeaked and squeaked at us from the top of a tree, flitting about like two kinglets with their black heads and eyes, white wing patches, and the two long feathers in their white-barred tails. Just as the white-breasted nuthatch grunts as it runs up and down trees, so does the gnatcatcher squeak as it flies about.

Then in the distance a mocking bird sang beautifully, and we realized that we were below Mason and Dixon's line indeed. After listening carefully to the mocker's performance, we all came to the conclusion that the catbird and the brown thrasher, — that florid grand-opera singer who likes an audience and the top of a tree for his stage, — when at their best, are both rivals of the mocking bird. The mocking bird, however, is always at his best, while one will listen to many mediocre performances from the other two birds.

Beyond the mocker we heard the song of another Southern bird, the yellow-throated warbler, much resembling that of the indigo bird. Those warblers had bright yellow throats with a black line over their eyes, like that which marks the Kentucky warbler, and showed black and white upon their sides, reminding us somewhat of the magnolia warbler. Curiously enough, the next year a little wave of yellow-throated warblers invaded Pennsylvania, and three of us found several of them near Paoli, while my son Gurdon, the real ornithologist of my family, identified one at Haverford not far from my home.

Another reminder that we were in the South was the sight of an enormous pine snake, all umber-brown and cream, which slithered along the pine needles and disappeared beneath a carpet of dry leaves. Quite appropriately, just after the sight of the snake, the Banker found an empty bottle in the woods, labeled "Pain-killer," with the formula printed on the label. It ran as follows: "Alcohol 59%, ether 30%, harmless vegetable extracts 11%." We all agreed that it would be a

severe pain indeed that would not yield to such a mixture.

The next nest fell to my lot. I was admiring the patches of bird's-foot violets showing here and there through the woods when, at the base of a bush, I saw a curious rosette of black and white which resolved itself into the white pinfeathers and black beaks of five little black-and-white warblers packed in a cunningly hidden nest made of dry leaves and lined with rootlets. The mother bird flitted around me scolding vigorously. The eggs of that bird, which I have seen, but have never been fortunate enough to find, are white, peppered with tiny black spots.

That day the five young birds, even when I came close to them, preserved a perfect immobility. Silent, with tight-shut eyes, they blended exactly with their surroundings, and if it had not been for the regular pattern which their five heads made on the ground I never should have been able to distinguish them from the leaves in which their nest was hidden. Only when I sat down beside them, pencil in hand to make notes of the nest and its materials, did they finally show any traces of life by suddenly all five opening their beaks in unison.

This discovery of my first black-and-white warbler's nest was a great delight to me, and I sat and gloated over it for a long time. To the uninitiated a bird's nest seems an unimportant thing, but there is an indescribable charm and delight in finding a rare one. What a moment it must have been for John Burroughs when he located, for the first time in ornithology, the nest

of the black-throated blue warbler, and knew that there were a score or so of other nests then that had never been found. No wonder that with such possibilities before him he preferred a bird walk to attending Lincoln's second inauguration, as he records in his journal.

There is the same thrill in finding a rare nest that a book collector might have who, in a pile of unconsidered volumes, stumbles upon a Tamerlane, or the philatelist who finds in a packet of old letters a Millbury stamp. Each man's hobby is his own peculiar treasure which no one may take away from him, nor should anyone cavil at his enthusiasm.

Two or three times after the others had gone on, I came back for a last look at my new-found nest, and found the tiny striped mother industriously depositing various assorted grubs and flies in the open bills of her bare, blind babies.

Another nest containing young birds was that of a Carolina chickadee, found by the Banker in a hole in a black-gum stub. The tiny bird had dug a little hole in the soft wood on the overhanging side of the stub so that the entrance to her nest was fully protected from the weather, and the nest itself contained three little birds and an addled egg. The young birds were in the pinfeather stage, the black spines being tipped with yellowish white, and when we put them all up on a twig to have their picture taken, each one opened his mouth wide as if to show how bored he was by the whole proceeding.

The Carolina chickadee is a smaller and gentler bird

than his Northern brother, with less white on his wings, and says, "Dee, dee, dee-o," instead of the louder "chickadee, dee, dee," of the other.

After that discovery came a long, uneventful interval. The Banker found a white-eyed vireo's nest four feet from the ground, made of bits of rotten wood and weed stalks all fastened together with spider webs and lined with strips of grapevine bark and fine grasses —but it was empty. As usual, from the lower part of the nest dangled a long strip of bark and a piece of string, an untidy detail which is always present in the nest of that vireo. Then I found a fish hawk's nest, not a very difficult proceeding, as it consisted of a cartload of sticks in the top of a dead pine. Both the fish hawk's nest and that of the bald eagle ultimately kill the trees in which they are located. That nest contained three large, cream-white eggs, beautifully marked and mottled with chocolate-brown. As we sat under the nest the ospreys circled around us, giving a whistling note, "chu, chu, chu," with at times a grating call like the chirring of a red squirrel.

For a time we lay on the high, dry bank beneath the osprey's tree and swapped bits of bird gossip and told the long, interminable stories of former adventures, in which ornithologists delight. Suddenly from out of a clump of trees a quarter of a mile away a great brown bird flapped, vigorously pursued by a pack of black, cawing crows. Focusing our field glasses on the fugitive, we soon made out that it was none other than a great horned owl, that grim death-in-the-dark who takes such a terrible toll of sleeping crows during the

winter months. The crows retaliate by always pursuing these owls frantically whenever they find one half-blinded by the sunlight. The fugitive finally took refuge in a dense clump of pines where his noisy pursuers could not come, and their clamor at last died away.

After a long rest beneath the osprey tree we went on, and it was the Naturalist who made the next discovery by kicking at a brush pile laced all over with green-thorn as he walked past it. Instantly from beneath the brush there sounded a tremendous scuffling, and a vast dark figure scurried out into the open and launched itself into the air—a turkey vulture with bare red head and black fringed wings. The Naturalist crawled in beneath the thorns and under a log found two dirty white eggs about the size of a turkey egg, blotched and speckled with brown. The mother bird alighted on a tree close at hand and stretched out her crimson, naked head weirdly. Suddenly a black speck showed in the open sky, which grew larger and larger, and in another minute the male vulture came circling down and joined his mate in the tree, and the two grim birds stared at us like black witches as we moved off. The Naturalist told us feelingly from the depths of his experience that it was no light matter to creep into the cave or hollow log where a vulture nest is usually found, as the female has a repulsive habit of disgorging carrion all over the intruder.

After the adventure of the vulture's nest, we separated, each taking a different direction, not to meet again until evening. As I hunted through the dry

woods I heard a bird melody somewhat like the slow, labored phrases of the scarlet tanager, who sings like a hoarse robin. The song, however, was softer and more indefinite than that of the scarlet tanager. In another minute I located the singer, and saw that he was none other than that bird of the South, the summer tanager, and the first one I had ever seen. The summer tanager does not have the black wings of his Northern brother, although his wings are of a darker color than the rest of his body, and there is a pink tinge to the tint with which every feather is stained, which gives an indescribable richness to the bird's plumage. The female was light yellow on the breast, and when she flew seemed to be cream-colored. The alarm note of both birds was "pitoo, pitoo."

Then as I watched the pair through my field glasses I suddenly heard the familiar scolding note of the scarlet tanager, "chick-er, chick-er," and into a tree close beside the summer tanagers flitted a magnificent fire-red bird with black wings, on his way North. It was a rare chance to be able to see two such brilliant birds side by side, and I studied them for a long time until the Northern bird at last resumed his journey.

Just as I was lowering my glasses, at the end of the branch on which the summer tanagers were sitting I caught sight of their nest, which, in my delight at studying their brilliant and unfamiliar coloring, I had entirely overlooked. It was even flimsier than the one which the Northern bird builds, being fastened flat in a crotch near the end of the limb, and held no eggs as yet.

Gradually the long day drew to a close. Overhead a red-shouldered hawk wheeled in circles, higher and higher, and its fierce scream came down to me faintly through the darkening air. At the foot of a great pine I suddenly came upon a little company of pink lady-slippers swaying on their long stems in the pearl-pale twilight like great jacinths.

Beyond them was a wood road which led me to a lonely field dotted here and there with holly trees, whose notched thorny leaves showed deep green against the yellowing grass. There I beat back and forth in the fading light, hoping against hope that in the last few moments of the long day I might yet find some other treasure of the South — perhaps the nest of a blue grosbeak or the eggs of a Bachman sparrow. There was no such good fortune for me, however, and when it seemed too dark for any more bird's-nesting, I turned back toward the woods where I was to meet my friends again. In the distance a chuck-will's-widow said in a very quiet voice, "Quick — Will — Will, Quick, Will — Will," very different from the ringing triads of our Northern whippoorwill.

Suddenly there was a glow in the east, and the rim of the full moon wheeled above the edge of the world and hung for a moment on the horizon like a bubble of pale gold. Then, as I stared up at the primrose sky, which was turning to a deep violet in the dimming light, the miracle for which I had been waiting all day came to pass. Notched against the sky on a bare branch about fifteen feet up in a holly tree, I could plainly see a nest camouflaged as a lichen-covered knot, only its indented edges against the sky betraying it.

WHEELING HAWK

For a moment I did not dare to hope that it was the nest for which I had sought so long. Focusing my field glasses on it, I could see, however, a long tail with white feathers in it showing over its rim, and when I kicked the tree, with a loud squeak a blue-gray gnatcatcher slipped off and flitted around in the twilight. In a moment the male gnatcatcher joined her, and the two, looking like miniature catbirds with their gray backs, light breasts, and long tails, flew about me.

The nest was almost like that of the ruby-throated humming bird's, save that it was some two inches deep. It was made of golden grass thatched on the outside with gray-green lichens which were fastened on with spider webs, and it was lined with cream-brown fern wool. The structure was set on a patch of natural lichens and so cunningly joined to them that it was almost impossible to tell which were the natural and which the artificial lichens. Inside were five tiny, light-blue eggs, thickly blotched with reddish-brown spots and looking like jewels in a beautiful casket. It seemed to me then, and afterwards, that a gnatcatcher's nest is the most beautiful one to be found on our continent. It is even more beautiful than the humming bird's nest, because it is larger, the opening of the nest being just the size of a half-dollar, while that of the humming bird is a trifle larger than a quarter-dollar.

For years I had heard of this nest, but had never really expected to find one. Once while canoeing on a stream in New Jersey in May, during migration, I had seen a blue-gray gnatcatcher, and again found a pair in the winter time down in Virginia while on a trip to the Great Dismal Swamp, and had also seen and

heard the birds while paddling through a noisome morass in northern Maryland one spring in a search for the nest of the prothonotary warbler. Later on I was to see another nest in the western part of Pennsylvania, close to the West Virginia line, but the finding of that one in Virginia will always remain in my mind as being perhaps my most interesting bird's-nesting adventure.

X

LOST ROAD

EDEN may have been more lovely and perhaps Paradise will be, but on earth to-day there is nothing so beautiful as Cornwall in June. The hills are covered with drifts of blossoming laurel and there are burning bushes of pink azalea, while little brooks choked with wild forget-me-not stretch like strips of turquoise across green meadows and from every thicket sound the strange, sweet harp-notes of the veeries.

It was there on one of those June days that I started on a hunt for an old house hidden away among the hills. Three walkative friends of mine, two years before, who were crossing Connecticut on foot, had told me of finding the ruins of a mansion house far back in the woods somewhere between North Goshen and Cornwall. So, to-day, with a package of lunch in my pocket, I set out, highly resolved not to return until I had found it.

Once before I had hunted for that house but lost myself among a maze of forgotten roads and only succeeded in finding an old tavern dropping to pieces on a hillside. When Rochambeau's army in 1781 marched from Rhode Island to Virginia to assist in the capture of Cornwallis, the officers stayed at this Cornwall tavern, while the soldiers encamped in the fields near by. In those days the road by it, even in the

depths of winter, was black with sleighs and wagons on their way from New Haven to Albany. Now it is as deserted as the ruins of the hostelry itself.

On that day I came upon tantalizing fragments of old glass bottles, a bit of a Lowestoft plate, a broken sprig teacup, and fragments of toddy tumblers hidden away under the eaves of the attic where careless servants had probably disposed of them a century and a half ago. Thrown out in a field near the house I found a vast iron pot with a hole in it, which, after a century of sap-boiling, I have promoted to the rank of a wood box.

There is always the chance of treasure-trove in abandoned houses. Once, over on Dibble Hill, many years ago, I visited a crumbling house in the woods and found there an exquisite mantelpiece made of fluted white pine of a peculiarly airy, delicate pattern. I was about to salvage it when a New England conscience stopped me. Years later I went there again, only to find that the house had fallen and the mantel was smashed to fragments.

In another ruin I rescued a wrought-iron door-handle with flaring crescents at either end from a pile of rubbish. Afterwards I built a house around it, for it is now on the bookroom door of Treetop, my Cornwall home. A friend of mine once found a lustre jug of a deep burning blue girdled with gold, standing intact on a beam in a cellar hole, and another a pair of brass andirons hidden in an old chimney.

So I dreamed of what flotsam the wreck of that old house might contain as I started off that morning.

Anything might be possible in that hidden and inaccessible house — if I could but find it.

I hurried past the oldest inhabitant of Cornwall, the Boundary Elm in the Half Moon Lot, which used to mark the corner where three farms met. It is a vast tree which must have originally grown in a forest, for its trunk stretches fifty feet sheer before the first limb appears and it is mentioned as a notable tree in records which go back to about 1750. From comparison with other trees of known age, it must be about three hundred years old, a grim and rugged survivor of the days when Indians hunted and wolves howled among the twenty-seven named hills of Cornwall.

Near the Boundary Elm is a small wine-glass elm, the most perfect one that I have ever seen. Many years ago when a number of trees were cleared out of that end of the pasture an uncle of mine saved this one for its beauty and it has always been known ever since by his name.

Beyond the elm tree stood the house that my great-grandfather built more than a century ago. When its ridgepole was laid, Great-uncle John, then a boy of ten, celebrated the occasion by standing on his head on the great oaken beam forty feet above the foundation, and was soundly spanked for his pains by his relieved father when he reached the ground again.

It was Uncle John who afterwards became a well-known doctor in Cornwall and who used to ride a black horse over the hills at all hours of day and night to visit his scattered patients. He always scorned a girth or a road and without fastening his saddle would

ride through the darkest nights straight across country by paths and trails which he had learned to know.

Beyond Great-grandfather's house lived Boodle Rogers, who used to do his ploughing and most of his work by night instead of day. It was his sister who married Niles Wadsworth, the village blacksmith, who had a fine bass voice and sang in the choir. When Barnum brought Jennie Lind to New York, Niles planned to travel down and hear her. If he went to hear a play actress, his wife warned him, she would never speak to him again. He did and she did n't. They lived together after that for over twenty years, but she never spoke a word to him from that day on, even when he lay a-dying. It was Niles' father who, when the trustees of the church were slow in mending a leak in the roof over his pew, hoisted his umbrella in church one rainy Sunday, a proceeding which brought about an immediate repair of said leak.

Turning off into the lonely road which leads down into Cornwall Hollow, I passed Wolf Rock, a boulder of gray granite nearly eight feet high, which stands close to the road. Beneath it is an arched hollow bedded with dry leaves where Indians used to sleep when the road was a part of the old Indian Trail which ran all the way from the Long House, as the fierce Six Nations named the upper part of New York State. Along the trail came every year two painted Iroquois warriors to collect the tribute of wampum from the tributary Connecticut tribes. On the top of the rock is a flat space covered with polypody fern. It was there that my great-great-grandmother once saw a

gray wolf seated with his head on his forepaws looking down at her as she followed the road to the Hollow.

That day as I went past all these familiar places and many more, I was struck with the silences which met me everywhere. Voices that once had spoken commandingly, lovingly, harshly, all were still and only memories remained of the men and women of my boyhood.

The long road down the hill was edged with the heavenly blue of the chicory, like the dreams which cling even to the dustiest lives. Once I passed a great bed of bouncing-bet, the soapwort of our ancestors, whose rose and white flowers had a healthy, fresh scent rather than a perfume, a bed large enough to scrub a whole family of children, and I put a handful of the leaves in my pocket and later washed my hands with them in a brook and admired the fine lather which they made. The leaves of the sweet-pepper bush have the same cleansing properties.

Beside the road black and yellow goldfinches flew back and forth with their curious dipping flight and sang canarylike songs, irresponsible little vagabonds unconcerned with the domestic cares which beset other birds in June, since they nest last of all, often not laying until August. Another common Cornwall bird is the chestnut-sided warbler, with his white cheeks, red-brown flanks, and golden crown. His song is often confused with that of the redstart and the yellow warbler, but usually, unlike theirs, ends with a rather explosive " whee-choo." He sings another song something like that of the chipping sparrow, while a third, so far as I can record it, runs " lul, lul, chee, chee, chee."

At the foot of the long hill I heard a loud whistle followed by a series of appealing little chuckles, and saw a chubby woodchuck waddling toward a stone wall, looking much like a small gray and tawny pig with a bristling tail.

Then, just before I reached the level floor of the deep valley, which in Cornwall is known as the Hollow, I came upon a bush of the Northern azalea in full bloom, a blaze of burning rose with a perfume like sandalwood, one of the most beautiful of all the azaleas. far surpassing the paler *nudiflora* or the pure white *viscosa* which grow farther south.

Climbing over the stone wall at the edge of the woods to have a closer view of the bush, I had my first of those little adventures which always come to one who walks abroad among the Cornwall hills. Just ahead of me a bird with an olive-brown back and striped breast ran along the ground like a mouse. She had that ochre patch on the crown of her head which has given her clan their sonorous title of golden-crowned accentor. Her drooping wings showed that her nest was not far away, and I soon found it under a spray of huckleberry bushes overshadowed by a wild sarsaparilla plant. It was built entirely of leaves and grass, arched over the opening at the side like the old-fashioned Dutch oven which has given the bird its more common name of oven-bird, and it contained four dead-white eggs with an aureole of blood-brown spots around the larger end. As usual the nest was marvelously hidden, and I never should have found it without the bird's help. Just beyond the oven-bird's home a bellwort grew

on a moss-covered stone beside a singing trout-brook. Four green-gold flowers nodded at me from the end of a long stem which shot up from a base of three smooth green leaves, while the dappled gold and brown brook sang to the flowers all day long in a gurgling monotone.

Beyond the bellwort a clump of cranesbill glowed against an emerald-green bank. As the cardinal flower is the epitome of crimson and the fringed gentian of dark blue, so the cranesbill is the purest, most vivid pink.

Crossing the Hollow, I reached at last an almost abandoned road which led up probably the worst hill known since Christian climbed Hill Difficulty. Up and up and up I climbed, past two lonely farmhouses clinging like swallows' nests to the hillside among old pastures which the blossoming laurel had overlaid with masses of rose and snow.

At last the road became only a water-worn track across bare boulders, and it was difficult to believe that a hundred years ago it had been a much-traveled highway to the town of Norfolk.

Rounding a bend in the road, I suddenly came upon a mother partridge with a little brood of striped leaf-brown chicks. One of them ran down a mouse hole, and another crept under a leaf, and when I looked for the others they were all gone. The mother bird had slipped into the brush and kept giving a little grunting note much like that of the white-breasted nuthatch. When I picked up the little bird that lay under the leaf, at first he played dead. Then, as he felt my hand closing

about him, he could bear the strain no longer and suddenly peeped piteously. At the sound the old grouse rushed out of the brush and into the open road, her black-bordered tail, striped with white, spread like a fan and her black ruffs distended on either side of her head. Hissing like a snake and mewing like a cat, she came almost to my feet and beat her wings frantically against the ground. I had not the heart to tease the poor bird any longer and set the little chick, which I was holding, upon the ground and rescued the other one from the hole into which it had crawled, and the two followed their mother into the woods. A moment later and I heard the old bird give a soft crooning cluck and knew that she was brooding her rescued little ones under her capable wings.

Beyond the ruffed grouse family I toiled on up the height until I reached its crest and all the kingdoms of the earth seemed spread out before me. Ring after ring of green-topped hills were all about me, while in the distance towered the lords of the Hoosac Range, Bear Mountain, with its stone tower, Lion's Head, with a double crown, and above them all, like a vast blue bubble against the sky, the Dome raised its mighty head.

Then I turned to the east and beyond patches of marsh and dense woods my eyes caught the gleam of a lake among the trees, glistening like a great silver platter which someone had carelessly left lying in the woods. Taking out a geological survey map of Goshen and Norfolk Townships, I looked in vain for any record of a lake at that point. Either it was a mirage

ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE

or I was on the eve of a great discovery which would perhaps link my name with those of Champlain and Hudson and other discoverers of unknown bodies of water.

Then I looked southward and there before me on the very crown of the hill stood the long-sought house. Though wrecked and ruined by a century and a half of years and the neglect of a generation which had forgotten it, yet the old mansion still showed traces of its former glory. There was a ridgepole made from a white oak beam a good fifty feet long, without a knot or a blemish in all its hand-hewn length. The low-set roof with its exquisite upward curve, the moulding over the front door, the shattered white-wood corner cupboards, the flooring made of white pine boards two feet wide, the vast fireplace and stone chimney stacks, all spoke of the days when men put more into a house than wood and stone. Something of their dreams, something of their hopes, went into their building.

In an upper chamber I stood at gaze before the picture framed in a dismantled window. Beyond the near-by hills, beyond the towering Hoosac Range, like filmy blue clouds loomed the Catskills themselves, which we who live on lower levels rarely see. Overtopping them all the blue head of Mount Washington touched the edge of a cloud and seemed capped with snow.

For long I looked at the peace and high serenity of the picture framed by those bleached boards in that dismantled house. Then, as I turned away, my eyes caught sight of another home so close at hand that it had

escaped my notice. On the window ledge not two feet away was the nest of a phœbe made of green moss and mud. It was crowded to overflowing by five fat little phœbes who all trustingly opened their beaks as I came near them.

I spent a happy hour in exploring the house, but found no hidden treasure nor secret rooms, always possibilities in an old mansion. A friend of mine was wandering through such a house in Pennsylvania, with his wife. Leaving her in one of the upstairs rooms, he went outside to admire the overhang of the old roof.

"How many windows are there in that room?" he called up to her.

"Two," she said.

"Well, there are three from down here," he shouted back.

"Secret room!" they both exclaimed in great excitement.

Searching for the same, they found a closet with a built-in chest of drawers. Climbing up on this, my friend located a sliding panel in the wall which admitted him to a tiny room with a window, a bedstead, chair, stand, and candlestick. Afterwards they found that the house had been one of the stations on the Underground Railway by which negroes were smuggled to Canada during the old slave days.

There was no such luck for me in the Apley house, and I finally left reluctantly and started for the lake which I could see gleaming in the far distance. I crossed marshy pastures, passing clumps of bilberry bushes, the high-bush blueberries, which are not found

anywhere else in the township, and plunged into the woods beyond. They were so dense that in a moment I had lost all trace of the water which I had seen so plainly from the hill. Pushing my way through the thick brush, I suddenly found myself on a road which seemed to lead in the direction that I wished to go.

Although hidden in the depths of the forest, it was no wood road such as charcoal burners or woodcutters might have made, but was evidently an old highway, with stone walls on either side and the remains of ditches and culverts hidden in the thickets that half covered it.

Farther and farther I moved into the forest. Suddenly from either side of me sounded a group of hermit thrushes like fairy choristers, singing their wild ethereal notes antiphonally. In many beautiful places of earth have I heard their magic song, but never a lovelier chorus than greeted me that day on Lost Road.

Farther on a bird sang from high in a tree top, "whee-oo, whee-oo, whee-oo, whit," and I recognized one of the three songs of the Blackburnian warbler, who, with his orange-red breast, flits like a coal of fire among the green leaves. His nest, made of tiny pine twigs and lined with hairlike roots, usually in the tops of tall hemlocks, is one of the prizes of oölogists. I have been present at the finding of no less than three of them, but so far have never found one myself.

Everywhere across the road trees had been felled recently, so that I had to climb over trunks or force my way through fallen branches, and I wondered who had taken so much trouble to block a deserted road.

Then the way led through dim green meadows and three times I came to the foundations of recently burned houses. Great stone steps were still standing in the long grass, with now and then a well sweep, but the houses themselves were gone, and even the apple and pear trees in the dooryards had been girdled and were dead or dying. I could think of no invasion of Connecticut later than 1812, but it seemed incredible that such havoc could have come to a countryside except in war times.

Here and there lilac bushes, masses of faint purple, had been left standing and the whole road was sweet with their fragrance. Some of them were of such a size that they must have gone back to the very building of the lost homesteads around which they grew. One bush I shall always remember, a white lilac which stood like a drift of snow against a mass of dark green leaves beside that lost and lonely road.

Beyond the deserted fields and pits of charred timbers which once had been homes, the road again ran through the woods and reached a ridge of high land. Turning aside from it to catch a glimpse of a Nashville warbler with his gray head and yellow breast, who was singing, "sweeter, sweeter, sweet," I suddenly found myself in Fairyland. The ground was carpeted with gray caribou moss and patches of golden pine needles, and there were masses of pink laurel, and moccasin flowers, those lovely rose-red orchids, nodded in the soft air, filled with the scent of azalea. Farther down the slope I met their queen, a great orchid which, instead of being pale rose, flamed a soft crimson as if

lit up by some inner light. She swayed statelily, and as I knelt before her I found that, like all queens, she was guarded, for close beside me sounded a threatening whir and the fierce hiss of a snake.

I doubt if any man of my age ever did a better standing broad jump, but as I landed I had to laugh in spite of myself. Beside a rock close to the orchid lay a three-foot milk snake, his tail buzzing against the dry leaves like that of a rattlesnake as he pretended to be a fierce and dangerous serpent. He had recently shed his skin and was in all the glory of a new coat of figured dark and light brown edged with black. His eyes were russet red like tiny shoe buttons and his forked tongue had black prongs, and he hissed and struck at me viciously as I picked him up, to show what a fierce and deadly creature he was. As a matter of fact a milk snake or spotted adder is both harmless and useful. He is frequently found around dairies, but is always seeking mice, not milk.

When I finally released that one he thrashed angrily from side to side and then disappeared in the dry leaves and moss with which his coloring blended perfectly. As I watched him disappear, I was reminded of a conversation that I once had in the pine barrens with an old darkey who claimed to be an expert in snakes.

I had that day caught a large specimen of a king-snake, which I was bringing back as a present to the Zoo—that black and white serpent which is immune to the venom of any snake in North America and which will kill in fair fight any rattlesnake which it may meet. The sight of the king-snake started my colored friend

on a line of snake stories. Among them, I remember, was one about a cow, name not given, on his father's farm who suddenly went dry. When she was watched, it was found that every afternoon she would go down into the far end of the pasture and low invitingly, whereupon a milk snake would creep out of the grass and milk her. When the snake was killed several quarts of milk gushed out of its mutilated body. After its death the cow pined away and died.

It was a very sad story, and quite as true as most snake stories. The stomach of the largest milk snake holds about four teaspoonfuls, and it could no more milk a cow than could a bird.

Beyond Fairyland, as I walked through a patch of thick woods on my way back to the road, there was a sudden rustle in the bushes ahead of me and two red-brown deer sprang up not twenty-five yards away. One, a buck with a fine set of horns, was in such a hurry to get away that he tripped and fell to his knees, while his mate, a wild-eyed doe, stopped and waited for him. Then they both started off again at full speed, their white tails and rump patches showing like snowy flags as they bounded through the brush.

To me it is a happiness that so many of the rarer wild folk are coming back. The moose are again in Massachusetts, the elk in Pennsylvania, and the beaver in New Jersey, after two hundred years, escapes at first but wild enough now. As for the deer, in the northwest corner of Connecticut they are becoming fairly plentiful. Neither my father nor my grandfather, who were both born in Cornwall, ever saw a deer in that

township. Yet not long ago I saw five in my neighbor's garden and three more on the road with the cows.

One morning at sunrise, from an early train, I saw, as we swung around a sudden curve, a magnificent buck surprised while drinking in the Housatonic River. With one bound he reached the bank and then stood and watched with pricked-up ears the rumbling train go by—a picture that stayed in my mind through many a stifling day in the city that summer.

My last sight of deer in Cornwall, before that day, was on the top of Pond Hill. Anything may happen on Pond Hill. There is the white-oak tree where my father shot his first wild pigeon, nor ever dreamed that the time would come when the flocks of that glorious bird would no longer darken our skies. On its slope I first found growing side by side those beautiful orchids, the purple-pink calopogon and the rose-pink pogonia. Near its summit I saw my first fox and found my first humming bird's nest, that little jewel casket which is thatched with lichens, lined with thistledown, and bound together by cobwebs. There until a few years ago stood Hen's Pine, a great tree which old Hen, the escaped slave who ruled my grandfather's farm with a rod of iron, saved from the woodcutters. At its base he asked to be buried with his fiddle, his axe, and his whip. There is Apple Tree Spring, where little shells bubble up under a wild apple tree, and White Birch Spring, guarded by a ghost. One always expects adventure on Pond Hill.

I had with me a little girl of mine who that day was taking her first pilgrimage to the Hill. We climbed

Sheep's Head, a bare pasture on the crest of the hill, and my companion climbed up on Tipping Rock, a balanced boulder which always looks as if it were going to roll into Cream Pond a mile below. Leaving her there, I went bird's-nesting in a patch of near-by woods and was hardly out of sight when from the far side of the grove a great buck came out. With head and horns proudly erect he drifted down the hillside like a shadow and passed within six feet of the little girl, who was high enough from the ground to be above the air currents on which a deer, like a fox, depends largely for safety. It was not until she stretched out one of her hands caressingly toward his soft nose that his liquid brown eyes caught sight of her. He snorted doubtfully and then stopped, and the deer and child looked into each other's eyes until the buck heard me coming out of the woods. Then like Peter Rabbit he went "lippety, lippety, lippety" down the hill, clearing bushes and boulders with great easy bounds, while the white flag of his tail waved behind him like Peter's powder puff. All her life long she will never forget that meeting with her wild brother of the woods.

Returning again to Lost Road after such a long detour, I followed it until at last I came to a path through the woods blocked like the road with felled trees, through which I caught a gleam of water. Following the trail,I found myself at last on the shore of the lake which I had seen from the old house and which must have been nearly a mile wide. There was no house nor human on its shores and slipping off my clothes I swam out until I could feel the pulsing cold water of

springs beneath me. Then I dived down and ten feet below the surface had a long underlake drink of the cold spring water. Afterwards, much refreshed, I swam back to my clothes and then followed the shore, admiring my new-found lake, until around a bend I came suddenly upon something which detracted from the importance of my discovery—a huge sign which stated in uncompromising language that my lake was the reservoir of a water company and that any person swimming therein was liable to a fine and imprisonment.

I hurriedly stole back to the road, realizing that a company which had burned down houses, girdled fruit trees, and destroyed a century-old road would think nothing of imprisoning me for life. Fortunately I encountered no patrol boat nor armed guard, and was soon on the road again.

All through the rest of that afternoon I followed it across the hills until just at twilight I suddenly stepped out of the solitude of the woods into the rush and whir of a procession of cars on a state highway. As I looked around bewilderedly a man stepped out of a near-by house.

"I've lived here ten years," he said, "and you're the first one I ever saw use that road."

He told me that I was four miles from Norfolk, and an hour later, tired and footsore, I telephoned my house from there to send a car for me and took refuge meanwhile in the charming little free library of that beautiful town.

As, towards midnight, we reached Cream Hill and

motored past the Half Moon Lot, all misty under a waning moon, we saw in the lane made through the fog by our headlights three pairs of eyes gleaming green through the mist like incandescent emeralds. We stopped the car and followed the lane of light through the field, being careful not to step outside of it, until we came within six feet of a doe with a spotted fawn on either side of her, all three fascinated by the bright light which streamed from our car.

For fully a minute we faced each other before the spell was broken, and my last memory of that day was of the wild, beautiful faces of those wood folk.

XI

COLLECTIONS AND RECOLLECTIONS

Some of the happiest days of my life have been spent with collectors of birds' eggs — oölogists, they call themselves. They are all so eager and excited and happy over their hobby that it is a pleasure to be with them. They regard me rather pityingly, however, because I take no share of the findings; yet I think that I have chosen the better part. Boxes of blown eggs leave me cold, but I shall never forget the days and nights in the wilderness which I have had on bird-trips, and the excitement of discovering rare nests and the pleasure of learning secrets of bird life, unknown to me before. It was one of those collectors who first introduced me to the home life of the barred owl.

There are few of the owl folk within a hundred miles of my home with whom I am less acquainted than with that death-in-the dark. On March 15, 1926, we started to explore a patch of woods not far from Princeton, New Jersey, where the year before the Collector had found the nest of that owl containing two young birds and an addled egg on April 6. Half a mile away a red-shouldered hawk had been nesting. That tigress of the air, the barred owl, would not brook any rival raptor in her woods and one night attacked the mother hawk on her nest and literally tore her to pieces, leaving the tree covered with feathers and fragments of flesh and bone.

It had been a month of freezing cold. The thermometer was only sixteen above when we started, and it did not seem to me that any sensible bird would dare to start housekeeping in such weather. The day was a perfect one of its kind, with an ice-blue, cloudless sky, and a sun whose brightness tried in vain to thaw the frost in the air. From the train the beeches and the red maples showed old silver against the gray-brown leafless trees, and pewter-colored stretches of ice lay here and there among the pale yellow grass of the marshes, streaming in the wind like a woman's hair.

At a little station we alighted and followed a branch road for several miles through a frozen swamp where gaunt dead trees showed here and there like tombstones among the tussocks. Once a winter wren ran like a mouse along the ground; a junco showed its white skirts for a moment; and a single redwing creaked to himself in a tree top near an enormous flock of starlings which kept up a vast chattering, with little strains of song rising to the surface of the tumult now and then like tiny breaking bubbles of music. Occasionally certain gifted mimics in the crowd would imitate other birds. One gave a reproduction of the rolling call with which the early flicker summons spring—"quick, quick, quick." Two others imitated a quail perfectly, giving both the "bobwhite" and, afterwards, the assembly call. From the top of a white-oak tree came a cheerful grunting note, and we saw a white-breasted nuthatch hopping around the upper branches, moving up and down headfirst, unlike the woodpeckers, which always have to back down, and that other tree climber,

the brown creeper, which always has to fly down. A little farther on we heard a lisping note, and a tufted titmouse, all black and gray with a wash of tawny along his flanks, showed us his neat little crest and jet-black eyes as he flitted through the underbrush. At last we came to a point on the track where the Collector told us the nesting tree was in sight.

We looked everywhere, but could find no tree that we thought would harbor a barred owl. Finally, our companion pointed out to us a leaning hickory and told us that the nesting hollow was on the other side. We made a long detour through the frozen woods, and when we were about fifty yards from the tree, out of a wide shallow hole in the side of its trunk a great concave face with a hooked beak and black staring eyes thrust itself. Through the side of the tree the bird had heard us coming with her microphonic ears. In another instant she pulled herself up to the edge of the hole and with a flap of her wings shot away like a gray shadow, a big burly bird who looked enormous as she flew. Moving back among the trees, we sat down on a log and awaited her return. Although she was so large she had not flown fifty yards before she had disappeared entirely from sight, probably crouching down on a limb behind a trunk where her gray and brown plumage blended perfectly with the bark.

Ten minutes later we saw a shadow moving toward us among the distant tree trunks, and a moment later the owl alighted on a limb too far away to be observed very well. In about five minutes more she came so near that through our field glasses we could see every

movement she made. With her gray feathers fluffed by the wind, she looked like a ragged hornets' nest hanging from a limb until one got a glimpse of her strange, concave face. Like all owls, she was unable to move her eyes, and consequently kept turning her head from side to side with a curious, peering, human-like motion, and would sometimes move it in almost a three-quarter circle so that she seemed to be looking directly behind where she sat. Each feather of her plumage was edged with white and buff and there was much black and brown in the coloration, but at a distance the whole effect was gray. The most impressive thing about the bird was her cavernous black eyes, unlike the molten golden ones of the great horned owl. These stared hollowly out from the sunken disk of her face like the eyes of a spectre. As we watched her she suddenly flew directly to the nesting hole, her great wings, muffled with down, making not the vestige of a sound. Arrived at the hollow, she sat on the edge and then sidled in headfirst, her barred tail feathers showing for a moment from the edge.

I had once seen a barred owl at Salem, New Jersey, approach at full flight the hollow in the tree where her nest was located and apparently plunge in without checking her speed for an instant. One of my friends secured a snapshot of her as she was entering the nest, and the camera showed something which the eye was not quick enough to follow. Just as she reached the nest the bird described a somersault, and, reversing her wings, checked her flight for an instant and slid in feet foremost, a bit of aeronautics one would hardly

expect from so large a bird. This owl was evidently not so skilled a flyer, yet she had all the keenness of hearing of her folk, for we had advanced hardly a few steps toward the tree when she was out and off again.

I have often been impressed by the extraordinarily keen hearing of birds. On one occasion I remember visiting the nest of a pileated woodpecker, that rare and huge black-and-white bird with a flaming red crest which is nearly as large as a crow. The nest was two feet down in a hole in a high tree and yet we were never able to come within a hundred yards of it without frightening the bird away.

The nesting hole of the owl was hardly fifteen feet up, but it was on the inside of a slanting trunk, a very difficult place to reach. The Collector clamped on his climbers and stamped his way up, while we encouraged him from below. Someone, probably a coon hunter, had driven a railroad spike into the side of the tree, evidently many years ago, for now it was nearly covered by the bark. A single telltale fragment of down clung to a branch outside of the nest, the only sign that it was occupied. In a few moments the Collector reached a point where he could peer down into the hollow, and a slow smile of intense satisfaction stole over his face.

"Three," he murmured ecstatically.

Then ensued a bit of acrobatics exceedingly creditable on the part of so aged a man. It was necessary to swing himself clear around and insert one arm as far in as possible in such a position that if his spikes tore loose from the tree he would inevitably break one arm

and one leg at the start and probably his neck at the finish.

No such catastrophe occurred, however. By his utmost efforts he could just touch the eggs with the tips of his fingers, and for a long time was unable to get them out. At last, moistening his chilled fingers to make them stick, he succeeded in rolling one egg after another up the side of the stub until they were all safely pouched in his pocket. Then, carefully unwinding himself from his contorted position, he climbed down and in another moment we were admiring a full and perfectly fresh clutch of barred owl's eggs—no mean prize from an oölogist's standpoint. They were white and resembled small hen's eggs, though not nearly so round as other specimens.

The nest itself was a hollow only a foot deep and had no lining other than a few dried oak leaves and feathers. As we moved away we heard the sudden furious cawing of a number of crows in the distance and I was reminded of an experience I once had up in Seven Mountains in the northern part of Pennsylvania with another friend. We were out very early one morning in order to hear the wild turkeys gobble. At the first streak of dawn the leader of a flock will gobble once or twice from his tree, the only sound he makes all day long.

As we came near the drooping branches of a hemlock, some crows flew overhead. Pulling me down beneath the branches, my friend gave a very good imitation of the deep, cavernous notes of the great horned owl, which sounds like the barred owl save that the note

keeps the same pitch instead of dropping a full tone. His very first attempt was answered by fierce cawing from overhead, which increased with every subsequent imitation until the sky was black with crows. In less than five minutes there were hundreds of them circling and cawing and hunting for the monster who harries them so terribly during the long dark nights of winter when the crow must sleep with his head under his wing or go blind from freezing the sensitive flesh around his eyes. Thus sleeping he has no chance against the winged death that hunts him through the dark. Accordingly, whenever he meets that vampire by daylight, he hastens to attack it.

For some time that early morning we kept up the deception, until the place was a whirlpool of circling, eddying, cawing crows. Only when we stepped out of our hiding place did a sudden silence fall upon them, and in less than a minute every crow had disappeared.

To-day the crows had evidently sighted their hated enemy, for, as we left, my last view of the barred owl was the sight of her fleeing through the distant tree tops closely pursued by a pack of cawing crows, who followed like veritable "hounds of Heaven."

Three days of smothering June heat and rain and my next holiday dawned clear and cool. Daylight found the Banker, armed with a camera of preposterous perfection and price, and myself in the fen land of New Jersey. The flat country was dyked and ditched everywhere, yet the water lay in the broad meadows and there were great stretches of marshland and wet, thicketed pastures where the bittern boomed

and the marsh hawk built her nest on the ground and the woodcock sang his vespers high in the darkening sky of an April evening.

Here and there were deep-bosomed brick houses with Dutch roofs and gable windows that went back to the days of William Penn, all hidden in cool masses of trees. With us was Dick, the game warden who knew all the wild folk by their first names, as well as every lane and causeway and marsh path in all that wild and watery country. We wasted no time where a flooded road disappeared in a marsh made up of cat-tails and mud, but plunged in and instantly sank nearly to our waists. Jettisoning our watches, knives, and keys in the highest pockets available, we held our coats shoulder high with one hand and waded on. Instantly a cackling derisive laugh, something like the mad laugh of the loon, sounded from all parts of the marsh.

"It's the Florida gallinule," explained Dick, learnedly. "You hear it, but you never see it."

How well I knew that! Last year I spent a day in a noisome swamp in Delaware, perched for the most part on the tops of muskrat houses, while the gallinules laughed all around me, sometimes not six feet away, yet I never had a glimpse of one of them. To-day, however, was to be an exception to all gallinule rules. After laughing at us, the unseen birds ran through their whole repertoire. "Kack-kack-kack, ko-o-o," one clucked, while another cackled like a guinea hen and a third remarked earnestly, "Cow, cow, cow," like a lot of chats that had taken to the marsh to live.

Then suddenly from out of the reeds across a clear

stretch of water, his head jerking with each stroke, swam a strange bird, blue-slate in color, with a brilliant coral-crimson beak and head-plate. It was none other than the Florida gallinule himself, and in another minute his mate swam side by side with him in plain sight. We decided that the pair must have a nest near by from which they were trying to lead us away. Sure enough, in a minute there was a shout from Dick. He had found the nest in the cat-tails about twenty feet from the causeway. A platform about a foot thick had been built of broken cat-tails, on which was a wide flat nest woven out of rushes and cat-tails and containing eight light coffee-colored eggs, blotched and speckled with reddish brown. Later on when I came to look at the nest again, I heard beyond us a heavy splashing as if some large animal were struggling through the flooded meadow, and there in the open water was the hen gallinule beating the water with outspread wings. As I watched, she swam ashore and clapped her wings against the ground, hoping dumbly to toll me away from her precious nest. Later the Banker found a washed-out nest with two eggs and Dick another in plain sight in the open marsh on the top of a platform of heaped-up rushes. We all wondered how the eggs escaped the fish-crows which are the terror of all nesting birds in that region. A few moments later we found the answer in a near-by kingbird's nest built in a bush not two feet from the water—a record for that tree-loving bird. The kingbird will not let a crow approach within a hundred yards of his nest, and this one evi-

dently guarded not only his own home but those of his neighbors.

For long we admired the four white eggs, blotched with oxblood-brown, among the most beautiful of all American eggs.

It was the Banker who made the next discovery—the nest of a Virginia rail on the ground in the wet pasture-land at the edge of the marsh, built of grass and holding seven buffy-white eggs speckled with rufous-brown. Later on he found another with six eggs. The Virginia rail is a mottled brown bird with a long curved beak, long legs and toes, and the short, turned-up tail which is the hall mark of all the rails. It grunts like a pig in swamps, and like its cousin, the gallinule, is heard far oftener than it is seen.

By this time the situation was a serious one for me. At great expense I had brought along a young naturalist of my family who had been brought up to believe that his father was unsurpassed at finding rare nests. So far I had found nothing except a couple of swamp-sparrow's nests, one with beautifully marked eggs aureoled with brown blotches against a faint blue surface; several redwing blackbird's nests, some with eggs, but most of them packed with the gaping mouths and fuzzy bodies of newly hatched young; and three long-billed marsh wren's nests with eggs, out of perhaps a dozen examined,—for this talented bird has a curious habit of building several nests for each one she uses,—while Dick found one with the bird dead on its eggs.

Their nests are wet balls of marsh grass and lined

with the fur of cat-tails. The eggs are among the darkest of North American eggs, being marked with a deep cinnamon brown. Sometimes, however, a set will be pure white, and a collector we met that day had recently found such a set in that very marsh.

None of the above nests, of course, could compare with the treasures already discovered. Then came the moment when I mistakenly thought I was about to retrieve myself. Out of the dense marsh grass suddenly sounded a shrieking grunt and right in front of me darted a rail almost exactly like the Virginia rail but much larger, — some five inches, to be exact, and I had my first sight of a king-rail, which many ornithologists have never seen nor heard. Usually the shyest of all, except the almost unknown little black and yellow rails, this particular one would come almost up to me, moving in circles with outspread wings. Every now and then in full view it would give a cackling grunt. An eminent ornithologist has written that no one to his knowledge has ever yet seen the king-rail give his note. This one had three, which he gave while I watched him. One was the startling shrieking grunt with which he would suddenly dart into sight, another was a much softer cackling grunt which he would give as he passed in and out of the long grass, and the third was a very low grumbling sound which he made constantly when not engaged in the rest of his performance. Several times he came to within two feet of me, bobbing his head and long curved beak threateningly and watching me all the time with a sidelong glance of his sinister red eyes. I, of course, decided that there must be a nest close by

and searched every square foot of marsh grass in a circle of thirty feet in diameter, but found nothing except several billion mosquitoes. At long last I called to the rest of the party, and for over an hour we quartered and circled and searched that swamp, but found nothing except an empty nest over by the edge of the marsh in the centre of a tussock, well hidden by the long grass. Once we found a fresh turtle egg in the mud, which the Banker tried to persuade me was a newly laid egg of the king-rail. Again, our young naturalist found a dead young king-rail like a velvety black little chicken, and later we found another empty nest with a dead newly hatched rail in it — all of which convinced us that hidden in the long grass was a brood of young king-rail from the first empty nest, which the male rail was trying to protect.

Anyway, it gave us the chance of a lifetime to see and hear a king-rail at the closest kind of range.

Space fails me to tell of the black duck and her brood and the brave crippled Canada goose which Dick found in another marsh, or of the red-bellied water snake which I dispatched; of the strange sparrow nest with four very light tawny eggs which Dick tried to convince us were a clutch of the sharp-tailed sparrow but which the jury finally decided were a freak set of a swamp-sparrow.

Sing, O Muse, in closing, of the last nest of the day. We had come to a meadow full of a round-stemmed marsh grass. Suddenly from all around sounded the note of the short-billed marsh wren, the second-smallest bird of our Eastern states. " Chip-chip-chippy, chippy,

chippy, chip," he sang, flying into the air at times and showing his yellowish streaked flanks — black and white and ochre are his colors. Then the search began. Down in the grass, Dick, the boy naturalist, and I all found nests, round balls of dry grass woven in with green stems and lined with quail feathers, beautifully constructed nests, but — empty.

Then came the Banker, who doddered aimlessly around and finally observed that he had found a nest with a full set of eggs. We could hardly believe it, but, sure enough, a foot from the ground he showed us a ball of dry, dead grass with a round hole in its side. It was not nearly so good-looking as any one of ours, but contained seven pure white eggs, which after all is what nests are for.

There was a mist of April rain through which newly sprouted wheat fields gleamed like square-cut emeralds against the hills. Three of us were hunting eagles' nests far down in Delaware. In the distance showed a high knoll surrounded by bleached marshlands and fringed with tulip-poplars in which were perhaps a hundred nests built of sticks. Around them soared in the sky and stalked on the ground huge gray-blue birds, and we recognized the spot as a heronry of great blue herons, the largest birds of our Eastern states. The wanderers had come back from the South to their home trees ready to begin housekeeping later in the month. Their light beaks gleamed like glass as they perched near the nests in which soon they would begin to lay their sky-blue eggs. One of the nests had been preëmpted by a great horned owl who was rearing two

little owlets in the same. We could see the two ear-tufts or "horns" of the fierce mother showing above the sticks of the nest before she floated away on wide muffled wings like a great moth, and wondered what would happen to the little herons in the heronry if she were still there when they hatched.

As we watched the birds circling around the nesting trees, a speck showed in mid-sky far above the highest of the herons and with our field glasses we caught a glimpse of a snowy head and tail and a pair of wings stretched straight against the blue, quite different from the upcurved wings of the osprey or the turkey-vultures.

"Bald eagle!" we shouted in chorus and knew that we were approaching the domain of that king of the air.

A few miles farther on and we came to a dead tree on the edge of Delaware Bay with a cartload of dry sticks in its top. Years before we had found that this tree was evidently owned by a bird syndicate, for a great horned owl nested there in February, a bald eagle a year later in March, and an osprey two months later in May. To-day, however, the nest was deserted, and although we scanned the sky from all points of the compass we could see no sign of an eagle. Once a rough-legged hawk flew by, that black hawk who by rights belongs much farther west. Again a pair of mated black ducks whizzed through the sky looking for some dry bank where beneath a bush they would build a nest rimmed with down from the mother duck's breast. Then we heard the loud call of the red-bellied

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woodpecker and caught a glimpse of his gray speckled back. A little later in a patch of snow that still lingered in a field we found the nest of a killdeer, that plover who wears two black rings around his neck and whose wild cry comes down to us in the North from gray March skies.

At last, in the middle of a wide marsh, we discovered several suspicious-looking masses of sticks in the tops of some high trees. Pushing our way through mud and water and thickets laced with barbed green-brier, we finally reached them. The first three proved to be deserted osprey nests. By that time the sun was setting and we were on the point of turning back when we discovered another nest half a mile to the west in a towering sweet-gum tree. Wet and bedraggled, we finally reached it, and almost immediately an eagle flew out of the tree, calling, "Pleet, pleet, pleet," as she circled above the nest, an absurd little note for so large a bird. She was joined by her mate, and the two magnificent birds wheeled around the tree as one of our party began to climb to the nest. Halfway up both of them swooped down upon him with open beaks and outstretched talons. Fifteen feet from his head, however, they swerved off and, wheeling higher and higher, disappeared in the sky. It seemed absolutely impossible that he could reach the top of the nest, which was fully six feet thick and stretched out all the way around the trunk. However, digging his climbers in deep, he began to break his way through the mass of sticks, pulling out one after another until he made a tunnel in one side of the nest through which he dragged

himself to the top. There in a hollow trimmed with shredded bark and lined with dry moss he found a single bluish-white egg, the size of a goose egg.

The trip down was, as always, more dangerous than the climb up. Lowering himself through the tunnel, he had to swing like a pendulum seventy-five feet above the ground until he could sink his climbers deep into the bark of the tree, and we were all much relieved when he finally reached the ground in safety.

A little later as we drove past swampy meadows in the dusk we heard among the jingling notes of the hylas a single call from the ground which sounded like the note of a nighthawk, although that bird would not be back for another month. Once again it sounded, "peent, peent, peent," and we suddenly recognized it as the opening note of the rare vespers of a woodcock. Suddenly from different parts of the dim sky fell a succession of loud sweet notes as the woodcock in his ecstasy circled around in the dusk above us and sang his love song. Then he alighted and finished with the same nighthawk note with which he had begun.

Late that evening in an old inn we gathered around a blazing fire and ate one of the best dinners ever served to tired and hungry ornithologists.

It was a hot July day later that year and we had been wandering along a sequestered New Jersey beach seeking the nests of some of the birds which live in that region. When noon came it was too hot to move and we burrowed into a bayberry thicket and rested there from our labors while we ate our lunch. In the scented shade the Collector told us the

story of the first finding of the nest of the solitary sandpiper, that bird which appears along our streams in the spring on its way to the Far North where it breeds, and which shows more white on its outspread tail when it flies than the spotted sandpiper, and moreover is brown with white spots, while the spotted sandpiper is brown with black spots.

One by one nearly all the secrets of the birds have been solved. For many years no one could find the nest of the little brown creeper, that speckled brown and gray bird that spirals up tree trunks in its search for minute insects. At last it was discovered under the loose bark of dead trees. Then the Tennessee warbler and the Connecticut warbler were found nesting in sphagnum moss in Northeastern and Northwestern Canada, respectively, but for many years no one could find the nest of the solitary sandpiper.

Finally, one afternoon in late May a few years ago a homesteader in Alberta was seated in front of his log cabin. Suddenly he noticed a large bird fly into a low tamarack tree and alight upon a deserted robin's nest. Upon investigating he found that the bird was none other than the solitary sandpiper, and in the mud bowl of the nest, just as it had been left by the winter storms, he found four of the most beautiful eggs imaginable, greenish-white, spotted with chestnut-brown and pale purple with a few black threadlike lines — and the secret of the solitary sandpiper was at last solved.

After lunch we decided to hunt inland through the waving stretches of green marsh grass. The first nest fell to my lot. I was walking along the edge of a little

salt-water pool fringed with rushes when I suddenly saw before me on a platform of dry reeds a nest canopied with a dome of green grass and containing thirteen cream-white eggs marked with sepia and purple spots. It was the nest of the clapper rail, which I had not seen since I was a boy and found them in the salt meadows along the edge of Long Island Sound.

A little later on the Naturalist found the nest of a seaside sparrow, that dusky bird with a light gray throat and unstreaked breast, whose note is "chip-bees, chip-bees."

It was the Banker who found the nest of that other marine sparrow, the sharp-tailed, a really beautiful sparrow with an orange and yellow band above his eye and a yellow patch at the bend of either wing, who has a feeble insectlike note something like that of the grasshopper-sparrow.

Then came the great adventure of the day. We were walking through a strip of glossy black-grass, when we came to a large clump laced about with morning-glories. As we passed, the Collector gave the mass a blow with his stick and out slipped a bird smaller than an English sparrow, with a sharp tail and bright red eyes, which instantly disappeared. In the clump we found a nest made entirely of grass and measuring three inches across. It contained eight white eggs, faintly peppered with reddish-brown specks, and at the sight the Collector shouted ecstatically: "Little black rail!"

The little black rail is the smallest of all its family, being only five inches long, a slate-colored bird with

a patch of reddish brown at the nape of its neck, while its back and wings are barred and spotted with white, and its nest is perhaps the rarest of any to be found throughout our Eastern states.

The tiny bird circled all around us, never flying, but slipping through the grass like a shadow. Several times we heard her note, a weak "cree, cree, cree," something like the squeal of a mouse. Once we left the nest and returned to find the bird again brooding her eggs. We made a complete circle about the nest so as to catch and photograph her. Suddenly she was not there. We had seen no movement, nor did it seem possible that any living thing could escape through the circle we made. Nevertheless, one moment the little bird was sitting on the nest and the next she was gone.

Beyond the little black rail's nest a spotted sandpiper flew up giving her sweet, plaintive call, "Pee-epp, pee-epp." As we stood still she swung around a little grassy patch of ground on her crescent-shaped wings, and we were certain by her actions that she had a brood of young somewhere near that spot. Hiding behind a bush, we watched her until she slipped into the grass as if she could not bear to stay away any longer from her little family. Then we ran to the place as fast as possible. It was a little patch of beach grass and seaside golden rod. Long before we reached the place where she had alighted, the mother sandpiper was in flight again. As we approached nearer to the spot she flew all around us frantically and alighted on the ground in front of us, dragging her wings as if they were broken and trying to toll us off.

We were not to be led away, however, by any such antics, and a moment later I spied four little sandpipers crouched in the grass in front of me as if frozen. One of them had just been taking a step as I came upon them, and he stood with one little foot stretched out in mid-air as if petrified. The other three crouched down, and their coloring blended wonderfully with the dry grass in which they were hidden. They were buffy-brown with a stripe of black velvet down their backs, and had the brightest of black eyes, and were about the darlingest little chicks that one could ever hope to meet. They did not move or make a sound even when we picked each one of them up. In an instant the little sandpiper-mother had alighted at our feet and was flapping her wings frantically against our shoes and crawling off through the grass trying to persuade us to follow her.

We could not bear to torture her any longer and laid the little chicks all down in a row side by side, stiff and motionless as if they had been turned to stone. Then we went back to the bush. In a minute the little sandpiper-mother swooped through the air and landed at the spot where we had left them, and we heard a chorus of happy little crooning notes as she brooded her dear-loved little ones beneath her swift wings.

XII

THE PEREGRINE FALCON

The sunset was all wind-blown flame and incandescent violet as we hurried homeward by lonely roads and lost lanes. Then the color deepened to old rose and a misted blue, while a band of dark pines tried in vain to bar the glory of the sky from earth. A long lake of silver-gray echoed the sunset as we whirled past, and my last memory of that lonely falcon country was the sight of an American bittern, that rare and solitary bird, standing motionless in the sedges outlined black against the gleaming water.

That day, starting at dawn, we had driven fifty miles northwards to the twin falls of Bash-Bish, the loveliest and loneliest in all the Berkshires. There we planned to visit the home of a duck hawk, the peregrine falcon of the Old World, which one of my boys had discovered earlier in the season. In the old hawking days the peregrine, the wandering falcon, which, like the short-eared owl, is found all over the world, ranked only as an earl among the nobles of the sky. The golden eagle was the emperor, the gyrfalcon the king, the goshawk the prince, and the rock falcon the duke. Yet the peregrine is the speed king of the sky, perhaps the fastest bird that flies.

In this country we have named him the duck hawk, after his prey. The canvas-back and red-headed duck

can fly at the rate of sixty-eight, and the green-winged teal at the rate of ninety-eight, miles per hour. Yet the duck hawk flies them all down with ease and kills them in mid-air with a blow of his clenched claws.

By midmorning we were climbing a wood road which had been built before the Revolution, when the forge which the falls had operated had been one of the largest in New England. Now great trees grew where the buildings had been, and only the slagged ground and walled banks showed where once had stood the famous Copake Iron Works.

As we approached the falls, a deep, elemental roar filled our ears, like the crash of surf or the sound of a mighty wind. Then, as we turned the last bend of the winding road, the muffled sound deepened to a stern and mighty shout and we saw twin torrents fall frothing a hundred feet and rush towards us white as snow. Between them in stern repose towered the Devil's Thumb, a vast triangular mass of black rock which separated the raging falls.

Hastily putting together our fishing rods, we managed to land a dozen or so plump trout in about that number of minutes. Thereafter a warning bell sounded amidships so loudly that we forgot even the glory of the cataract and the peace of the brooding forest. "Dinner! Dinner! Dinner!" it clanged insistently, until we built a fire of dry laurel twigs, the best cooking wood there is, and fried the trout and six eggs, just in time to save our lives.

After the meal, leaving my youngest boy to guard the car, I followed the naturalist of my family up the

steepest path in the world, bar none, until at last we reached the edge of the vast bowl of gray granite, perhaps four hundred feet deep and about that distance across. Some forgotten cataclysm, some sword slash of elemental fires, had hollowed this out of the riven rock when the moon was young.

As we stood and rested, the songs of black-and-white warblers like little creaking wheels came up to us from the depths, while in the hemlocks black-throated greens sang, "Trees, trees, murmuring trees," according to Burroughs, or "Cheese, cheese, a little more cheese," according to my more practical companion. Then a black-throated blue warbler rendered his hoarse, slow song, and, unafraid, showed us near at hand his sombre beautiful cloak of dark blue with the square white wing patches.

A fissure in the rocky wall, carpeted with wine-red columbine, slanted down the cliff to the ledge where the falcons had nested that spring. Down this we crept, following a steep and slippery path, which, fortunately for our nerves, was masked from the sheer precipice beside it by a growth of mountain ash and small hemlocks. At only one point was the going dangerous. There we had to scramble over a jutting rock some six feet in height and jump down on the other side, landing less than a foot from a sheer drop of a hundred feet. Clutching the bushes as we struck the rock, we checked our forward motion in time and followed the winding path until it seemed to end where a bar of rock jutted straight out from the cliff face. Climbing over this cautiously, keeping our eyes away from the depths

below, we swung in toward the cliff and found ourselves in one of the wildest, most romantic spots imaginable.

If I am ever elected to the captaincy of a robber band, which hardly seems likely at this late date, I shall certainly select that eyrie of the falcon as a refuge. Hidden from above by arching rocks, it was a shallow cave thickly carpeted with sapphire-blue harebells and the pure, pale pink of the cranesbill, while its walls were fringed with clumps of ebony spleenwort. A place had been scraped in the dust among the flowers about the size of a dinner plate and some three inches deep, where the hawks had nested that spring. A small ledge branching off from the cave had been used as a midden heap, and there we found the foot of a ruffed grouse, the feathers of a flicker and a hairy woodpecker, the remains of a bobwhite, and the crop of a pigeon, olive-green inside and filled with small pebbles.

Returning to the cave, we sat among the flowers, shaded by saplings of panicled dogwood and mountain maple hung with clusters of pale gold blossoms, and listened to the drumming roar of the falls far below. The cold fragrance of the flying spray drifted up towards us mingled with the perfume of the hemlocks. A chebec called among the clustered white birches, and across the amphitheatre of gray granite the hillside beyond was like a wonderful Eastern carpet of brown and silver and deep green.

Every ten seconds a drop fell into the depths below us from the arched rocks overhead, and we took turns

in filling our cupped hands and drinking deep of the icy water. It was towards evening before we came back to the car and saw the lonely figure of my littlest boy waiting for us in the twilight which came so early in that deep ravine. As the dark crept up the gorge like a slow stain, the roar of the falls seemed to become hoarser and more menacing. Although he was too proud to tell us how sorely the loneliness and our long absence had taxed his courage, yet I shall never forget the relief that shone in his face as we rounded the corner and called to him. Soon after that day he left me, and one of my last memories of him is that lonely little figure waiting so patiently for us to come back to him. What would I not give to see him now at the end of a long day waiting for me once more.

In spite of our long stay in the glen, we came back from Bash-Bish without having seen a duck hawk. Probably the fierce brood had been starved into learning to fly, when the time came, in accordance with falcon custom, and had then departed with the parent hawks to better hunting grounds.

Strangely enough, my first sight of a duck hawk was had in the very heart of Philadelphia. From my inner office, thirteen stories above the ground, one winter day, as I was dictating a brief, I caught the flash of long, narrow wings against the sky, and astonished my stenographer by leaning perilously far out of the window to watch a duck hawk slashing his way through the misty air. Later on, I found that the wanderer, an old male, had chosen as his eyrie the hat of William Penn, who stands on the top of City Hall, five hundred

and fifty-five feet above the streets of Philadelphia. There he lived for two winters, the joy of all ornithologists and one of the sights of the city, feeding comfortably on the pigeons which defile the public buildings, until finally shot by a young lawyer, one of those vandals who are doing their best to make extinct all of the rarer and more striking forms of wild life in this country.

As I watched the bird, I was, as always, impressed with the way in which it resembled its little brother, the sparrow hawk. The duck hawk, of course, is much larger, being almost the size of a red-shouldered hawk, but it flies in the same way and has the same style of wings and tail as our smaller and more common falcon. Moreover, when a duck hawk alights, it jerks its tail to balance itself as one may see a sparrow hawk do when it perches on the top of a tree.

It was in the spring after my first sight of the duck hawk in Philadelphia that I had another chance to study the home life of that magnificent falcon.

On the seventh day of May, I left the sleeper at Tyrone, that quaint Scotch-Irish village in the northern part of Pennsylvania, where I was to meet the Collector, who had located the nest of a duck hawk outside of the town.

The silvered night had just slipped away and the air was full of flower scents and bird songs, while the beeches with their tracery of gray twigs and pink opening leaves showed against the dawn in fretted patterns of rose lace. In the east the sky was like the inside of some vast sea shell, all stippled gold and pearl and

sapphire-blue; then, like the opening of a furnace door, the sun flamed above the horizon and a new day had begun.

I met the Collector at an old wooden bridge, built before the Revolution, on which we crossed the Juniata, not blue, but a gray-green stream which ran frothing through the town. Overhead, the first warbling vireo of the season for me sang his little song, so difficult to tell from that of the purple finch, and on our way through the sleeping town we passed old, old houses, encircled in quaint grilles of wonderful ironwork such as we see no longer in these modern days.

Beyond the village we came into the falcon country, a land of high hills and rushing streams and deep valleys which ran far to the southward and through which the austral birds penetrated to this northern country and mingled with their boreal brethren. Among the hills covered with purple haze the flowering cherry trees showed like beautiful ghosts. Here and there in the green hillsides were masses of lavender-blue phlox and long streamers of the vivid cerise blossoms of the redbud. The air was full of the buzz of parula warblers, and the Louisiana water thrush sang a song phrased much like that of the vesper sparrow. First came two loud, introductory notes followed by a snatch of ringing music, the whole dying away in a spray of twitterings. Then, from far across the stream, all gray and green and white, a cardinal whistled his lovely double note, "Wheeple, wheeple, wheeple," and his call was like a breath from the South.

Two miles beyond the village we came to a high hill

crowned with a cliff which jutted far out into mid-air and was fringed with dark green hemlocks.

There the Collector told me a duck hawk was nesting, and to prove it he suddenly clapped his hands together loudly. At the sound a blue-gray hawk with long, narrow wings flashed into the air from the side of the cliff. She had a barred tail, a buffy-white breast, which in the true peregrine of the Old World is likewise barred, and her belly showed narrow black markings. Even in the distance we could plainly make out the two broad stripes enclosing her beak like a pair of black moustaches, which are the field mark of the peregrine.

As she flew, the falcon gave a loud, hoarse note something like the quacking of a duck, yet with a creaking quality running through it. As her wings moved with quick, sharp beats, her hooked, golden beak flashed in the sun, her great feet showed lemon-yellow and her barred tail white. For a moment she soared and curved through the air, the very embodiment of stripped, sheer speed, then her long wings shot out and she darted away like the flash of a shooting star.

Her cries had aroused the male falcon, who had been perched on one of the great chimneys of rock which flanked the eyrie, and he joined her in complaining of our presence. His notes were slower than hers and had something of a drawling quality, and he was fully a third smaller than his fierce mate. As we watched them, they soared high and higher into the sky until they showed only as black specks against the blue.

Circling the hill, we climbed up from the other side

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through a dense growth of hemlocks, and long before we had won to the summit the falcon was back again on her nest. Finally we reached the top, and from the bare crag we could see far across that wild and lonely land. Just below us the curve of the Juniata was fringed with hemlocks and the opposite hillsides were still brown, with here and there a snowy shadblow showing against the patches of tender green which the new leaves of some of the earlier trees made.

Moving carefully through the shaly, sliding stones, we came at last to the edge of the cliff, to be confronted by a sheer drop of a hundred feet to the valley below. Before us a stunted cherry tree hung over the precipice, and the Collector whispered to me that the hawk's nest was on a ledge only a few feet below the trailing boughs. Gripping a stout branch, I lay down flat and thrust my head and shoulders out into space. At first I could see nothing, since the face of the cliff curved in beneath me. Thrusting myself out a little farther, I at last caught a glimpse of a yellow, hooked beak and an eye gleaming like a crumb of black glass. There was a rush like a rocket as the brooding falcon launched herself into space, her long wings actually fanning my face as she flew, and in an instant she was whizzing through the air a hundred yards away.

Gripping the tough branches and supporting myself by a narrow chimney of rock that ran clear to the ledge below, I managed to reach the nesting site without much difficulty. It consisted of a flat ledge of mica schist protected from the weather by arching rocks above. There, lying on a few small bones, was a single,

addled egg, about the size of a hen's egg, of a buff color blotched with claret-brown, a most beautifully marked specimen according to the Collector, who spoke from knowledge, since he had taken in his time over a dozen different sets of duck-hawk eggs.

In spite of the beauty and rarity of the egg, I was far more interested in the other occupants of the nest, for there on the naked rock, looking out into sheer space, sat three young falcons only a few days old.

All three of the young buzzards, to borrow from the old hawkers' vocabulary, were covered with tiny white feathers and had white beaks and haughty black eyes and yellow legs and claws. They kept up an incessant, fretting, hungry cry, although their little bellies were as tight as drums with food. Covered with their white natal down, they looked like huge powder puffs. In the nest I found the feathers of a meadow lark, a hairy woodpecker, and the feet of a flicker. Except for these remains, the ledge was clean and tidy, for Mrs. Duck Hawk is always a good housekeeper.

Crouching carefully, I sat down on the shelf side by side with the three fierce fledglings, and watched the mother hawk wheeling through the sky, giving her harsh call from time to time as she flew.

As I stared at her through my field glasses, a black turkey vulture came wheeling and veering on his fringed wings above the hills. It seemed strange to find a vulture so far north, but, like the cardinals, they followed the course of the long valleys stretching up from the South, and the Collector once found a vulture's nest on one side of that valley in a cave and the

nest of a northern raven on the other side—a combination of boreal and austral birds rarely ever met. That raven's nest, by the way, contained seven eggs, a record clutch for that rare bird.

As the grim black wings of the turkey vulture showed above the trees, the peregrine shot towards him like a meteor. Although larger than his assailant, the vulture never tried to defend himself, but stopped his majestic soaring and flapped frantically upward like a huge crow. The hawk tried, at first in vain, to obtain the weather gauge of the other and to rise above him so as to deliver the smashing blow with which a falcon kills its prey.

Through my glasses I could see the red, naked head of the vulture stretched out tensely as he flapped and flew with all his might, trying to keep above the hawk. Before long, in spite of his greater wing spread, the falcon's speed began to tell and she gained on the other, until at last she circled well above the grim black bulk of the larger bird. Then, sudden as a flash of heat lightning, the hawk swooped down upon the vulture and struck him one tremendous blow with her talons clenched like fists, rising after her stoop and disappearing behind the hill in one sweeping curve. The turkey vulture, flapping desperately, sank lower and lower until he disappeared among the tree tops. For a time I thought he had been killed or disabled, but a few moments later I caught a glimpse of him, circling furtively over the trees with a great gap in one of his wings where the blow had landed and torn out several feathers. Undoubtedly, if the falcon had landed a

direct blow on the vulture's head or back she would have killed the other bird in spite of his superior size and weight.

For a long time I sat in the eyrie, my feet dangling into space. Across the valley towered Tussey's Mountain, named after a hero of one of those border wars waged by the English, French, and the terrible Six Nations for that debatable land in the old days.

Now and then the mountain would be darkened by drifting clouds through whose shadows blossoming wild cherry trees showed like patches of summer snow.

Along the stream a spotted sandpiper peeped. Perhaps he was a brother of the bird whom one of my friends saw escape from a duck hawk the fall before at Cape May. That day a sandpiper was skimming along the surface of the water when a duck hawk swooped down upon him from the sky. The little piper fled for his life, peeping shrilly, but the winged death was upon him in a moment. Then, just as the hawk's talons flashed above him, the fugitive suddenly dived under the water like a duck — as unusual an occurrence as for a woodchuck to climb a tree, for the sandpiper is not ordinarily either a diver or a swimmer.

The falcon flew on without even looking back, and a moment later the little wader came to the surface, shook the water from his wings, and swung off towards the shore, his life saved by his versatility.

To-day this one had no such adventure, and his wild, sweet notes died away in the distance as he curved around a bend in the river on his crescent-shaped wings.

One of the little hawks in the eyrie had been knocked

over when his fierce mother shot away from the nest at my approach, and lay kicking frantically at the very brink of the precipice, too fat and round to right himself. I rescued him from his perilous position and set him upright again in the nest, where he sat proudly erect with his big yellow feet sprawled out in front of him. He evidently blamed me for his mishap, and hissed threateningly at me when I picked him up, and glared at me during the whole time I was there.

When at last I started to leave the ledge he gave a loud squeak, and my last view of that falcon home showed him sitting bolt upright, flapping his stumpy wings triumphantly, evidently convinced that, unaided, he had driven me out of the eyrie.

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